

GIFTS
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BEHIND

*The Dhamma Legacy of
Phra Ajaan Dune Atulo*

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Phra Ajaan Dune Atulo
(Phra Rājavuddhācariya)*

COMPILED BY

Phra Rājavaragūṇa

TRANSLATED FROM THE THAI BY

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

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A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ajaan Dune Atulo was born on October 4, 1888 in Praasaat Village in Muang District, Surin province. At the age of 22 he ordained in the provincial capital. Six years later, disillusioned with his life as an uneducated town monk, he left to study in Ubon Ratchathani, where he befriended Ajaan Singh Khantiyāgamo and reordained in the Dhammayut sect. Shortly thereafter, he and Ajaan Singh met Ajaan Mun Bhūridatto, who had just returned to the Northeast after many years of wandering. Impressed with Ajaan Mun's teachings and with his deportment, both monks abandoned their studies and took up the wandering meditation life under his guidance. They were thus his first two disciples. After wandering for 19 years through the forests and mountains of Thailand and Cambodia, Ajaan Dune received an order from his ecclesiastical superiors to head a combined study and practice monastery in Surin. It was thus that he took over the abbotship of Wat Burapha, in the middle of the town, in 1934. There he remained until his death in 1983.

As one of the most senior members of the Forest tradition founded by Ajaan Mun, Ajaan Dune was widely known as Luang Pu, a term of great respect and affection, meaning "Venerable Grandfather."

INTRODUCTION

Many people have asked for Luang Pu's Dhamma talks, out of a desire to read them or listen to them, and I have to confess frankly that Luang Pu's Dhamma talks are extremely rare. This is because he never gave any formal sermons or discoursed at any great length. He simply taught meditation, admonished his students, answered questions, or discussed the Dhamma with other elder monks. He would speak in a way that was brief, careful, and to the point. In addition, he never gave sermons at formal ceremonies.

So in response to the desire and interest that many people have shown in Luang Pu's Dhamma, I have compiled this book of his short teachings—pure truths at the highest level, lessons and admonishments he gave his students, answers to questions, and passages from the Buddha's words in the Canon that he always liked to quote. Because I lived for a long time with him, to the end of his days, I have gathered these passages from memory or from notes in my journal. I have also included the events, locations, and people who were involved, to help make the passages easier to understand and more inviting to read.

It was noteworthy—and amazing—that even though Luang Pu normally wouldn't speak, or would speak as little as possible, he was still very quick and astute in his expression, never missing his mark. His words were brief but full of meaning, every sentence containing a message complete in itself. It was as if he would hypnotize his listeners, forcing them to ponder his words for a long time with their deepest discernment.

The reader—noticing that some of the passages here contain teachings that are ordinary, some that are amusing, and some that are pure truth on the ultimate level—may wonder why they weren't placed in ascending order, from easy to difficult, or from low to high. The reason I didn't place them in order like that is because each passage is complete on one page, and I wanted to vary the atmosphere. If this is inappropriate, unseemly, or faulty in any way, I ask that all those who are learned will be kind enough to forgive me, an author of very little intelligence.

Phra Khru Nandapaññābharāṇa
(currently, *Phra Rājavaragūṇa*)

July 1, 1985

1. A DHAMMA WELCOME

On December 18, 1979, Their Majesties the King and Queen paid a private visit to Luang Pu. After asking about his health and wellbeing, and engaging in a Dhamma conversation, the King posed a question: “In abandoning the defilements, which ones should be abandoned first?”

Luang Pu responded,

“All the defilements arise together at the mind. Focus right at the mind. Whichever defilement arises first, that’s the one to abandon first.”

2. NO RESISTANCE

Each time, after Their Majesties came to visit Luang Pu and had dealt with the purpose of their visit, on taking their leave the King would say, “We request that you keep your aggregates (*khandhas*) going for more than one hundred years, to provide the general public with an object of respect. Can you accept our request?” Even though this was simply a polite formality, and the King’s way of giving a blessing to Luang Pu, Luang Pu didn’t dare accept, for he couldn’t resist the nature of fabricated things. So he would respond,

“I’m afraid I can’t accept. It all depends on how fabricated things go of their own accord.”

3. ON THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

A senior monk of the meditation tradition came to pay his respects to Luang Pu on the first day of the Rains Retreat in 1956. After giving him instruction and a number of teachings on profound matters, Luang Pu summarized the four noble truths as follows:

“The mind sent outside...is the origination of suffering.

The result of the mind sent outside...is suffering.

The mind seeing the mind...is the path.

The result of the mind seeing the mind...is the cessation of suffering.”

4. ABOVE & BEYOND WORDS

A well-read layman was conversing with Luang Pu, saying, “I firmly believe that in our present day and age there are not just a few monks who have practiced to the point of reaching the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna. So why don’t they make their knowledge public, so that those who are interested in the practice will know of the levels of Dhamma they have attained, as a way of giving them encouragement and hope so that they’ll accelerate their efforts to the utmost of their ability?”

Luang Pu answered,

“Those who have awakened don’t talk of what they’ve awakened to, because it lies above and beyond all words.”

5. A WARNING FOR HEEDLESS MONKS

“A monk who lives heedlessly simply counts his precepts as they’re found in the textbooks, proud of himself that he has all of 227 precepts.

“But as for the number he’s actually intent on observing, how many are they?”

6. REAL, BUT NOT FOR REAL

It's normal that when people practicing concentration start getting results, they can have their doubts about what they've experienced—for example, when they experience conflicting visions or start seeing parts of their own bodies. Many people came to Luang Pu, asking him to resolve their doubts or to give them advice on how to continue with their practice. And a lot of people would come to say that when meditating they saw hell or heaven or heavenly mansions, or else a Buddha image inside their body. "Was what I saw real?" they would ask.

Luang Pu would respond,

"The vision you saw was real, but what you saw in the vision wasn't."

7. LETTING GO OF VISIONS

The questioner might then ask, “You say that all these visions are external, and that I can’t yet put them to any use; if I stay stuck simply on the vision I won’t make any further progress. Is it because I’ve been staying so long with these visions that I can’t avoid them? Every time I sit down to meditate, as soon as the mind gathers together it goes straight to that level. Can you give me some advice on how to let go of visions in an effective way?”

Luang Pu would respond,

“Oh, some of these visions can be lots of fun and really absorbing, you know, but if you stay stuck right there it’s a waste of time. A really simple method for letting go of them is not to look at what you see in the vision, but to look at what’s doing the seeing. Then the things you don’t want to see will disappear on their own.”

8. EXTERNAL THINGS

On December 10, 1981, Luang Pu participated in the annual celebration at Wat Dhammamongkon on Sukhumvit Road in Bangkok. A large number of temporarily ordained women from a nearby teachers' college came to discuss the results of their vipassanā practice, telling him that when their minds settled down they would see a Buddha image in their hearts. Some of them said that they saw the heavenly mansions awaiting them in heaven. Some saw the Culamaṇi Stūpa [a memorial to a relic of the Buddha kept in heaven]. They all seemed very proud of their success in their practice of vipassanā.

Luang Pu said,

“All the things that appeared for you to see are still external. You can't take them as a substantial refuge at all.”

9. STOPPING TO KNOW

In March, 1964, a large number of scholarly and meditating monks—the first group of “Dhamma missionaries”—came to pay their respects to Luang Pu and to ask for teachings and advice that they could use in their work of spreading the Dhamma. Luang Pu taught them Dhamma on the ultimate level, both for them to teach others and for them to put into practice themselves so as to reach that level of truth. In conclusion, he gave them a piece of wisdom for them to take and contemplate:

*“No matter how much you think, you won’t know.
Only when you stop thinking will you know.
But still, you have to depend on thinking so as to know.”*

10. ADVANCEMENT OR DESTRUCTION

On that occasion, Luang Pu gave an admonition to the Dhamma missionaries, at one point saying,

“When you go out to disseminate and proclaim the Buddha’s teachings, it can either lead to the advancement of the religion or to its destruction. The reason I say this is because the person of each Dhamma missionary is the determining factor. If, when you go, you behave in an appropriate way, keeping in mind the fact that you’re a contemplative, with manners and behavior corresponding with what’s proper for a contemplative, those who see you, if they don’t yet have faith, will give rise to faith. As for those who already have faith, your behavior will increase their faith. But as for the missionaries who behave in the opposite fashion, it will destroy the faith of those who have faith, and will drive those who don’t yet have faith even further away. So I ask that you be consummate both in your knowledge and your behavior. Don’t be heedless or complacent. Whatever you teach people to do, you yourself should also do as an example for them.”

11. ON THE ULTIMATE LEVEL THERE'S NO DESIRE

Before the Rains retreat in 1953, Luang Phaw Thaw, a relative of Luang Pu's who had ordained late in life, returned from many years of wandering with Ajaan Thate and Ajaan Saam in Phang-nga province to pay his respects to Luang Pu and to learn more about meditation practice. He spoke with Luang Pu on familiar terms, saying, "Now that you've built an ordination hall and this large, beautiful meeting hall, you've probably reaped a really huge amount of merit."

Luang Pu replied,

"What I built was built for the general good, the good of the world, of the monastery, and of the religion, that's all. As for reaping the merit, what would I want with merit like this?"

12. TEACHING HIM A LESSON?

Six years after the Second World War was over, the legacy of the war remained in the form of the poverty and difficulties caused by the shortages of food and materials that affected every home. In particular, there was a great shortage of cloth. If a monk or novice had even one complete set of robes, he was fortunate.

I was one of a large number of novices living with Luang Pu. One day Novice Phrom, another one of Luang Pu's nephews, saw Novice Chumpon wearing a beautiful new robe, so he asked him, "Where did you get that robe?" Novice Chumpon told him, "I was taking my turn attending to Luang Pu. He saw that my robe was torn, so he gave me a new one."

When it came Novice Phrom's turn to give Luang Pu a foot massage, he wore a torn robe, with the idea that he'd get a new robe, too. When he had finished his duties and was leaving, Luang Pu noticed the tear in the robe and was struck with pity for his nephew. So he got up, opened a cabinet, and handed his nephew something, saying,

"Here. Sew that up. Don't go around wearing a robe all torn like that."

Disappointed, Novice Phrom had to quickly accept the needle and thread from Luang Pu's hand.

13. WHY DO THEY SUFFER?

A middle-aged lady once came to pay respect to Luang Pu. She described her situation in life, saying that her social position was good and she had never lacked for anything. She was upset, though, over her son, who was disobedient, disorderly, and had fallen under the influence of every kind of evil amusement. He was laying waste to his parents' wealth, as well as to their hearts, in a way that was more than they could bear. She asked Luang Pu to advise her on an approach that would lessen her suffering, as well as getting her son to give up his evil ways.

Luang Pu gave her some advice on these matters, also teaching her how to quiet her mind and how to let go.

After she had left, he commented,

“People these days suffer because of thoughts.”

14. INSPIRED WORDS

Luang Pu continued with a Dhamma talk, saying, “Material things are already there in the world in a way that’s perfectly complete. People who lack the discernment and ability can’t take possession of them and so they have difficulties in providing for themselves. Those with the discernment and ability can take possession of the valuables of the world in large quantities, making life convenient and comfortable for themselves in all circumstances. As for the noble ones, they try to conduct themselves for the sake of gaining release from all those things, entering a state where they have nothing at all, because—

“In the area of the world, you have things that you have. In the area of the Dhamma, you have something you don’t have.”

15. MORE INSPIRED WORDS

“When you can separate the mind from its involvement with all things, the mind is no longer tied to sorrow. Whether sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations are good or bad depends on the mind’s going out to fashion them in that way. When the mind lacks discernment, it misunderstands things. When it misunderstands things, it gets deluded under the influence of all things that are binding, both physically and mentally. The ill effects and punishments we suffer physically are things from which other people can help free us, to at least some extent. But the ill effects within the mind, to which the mind is in bondage through defilement and craving, are things from which we have to learn to free ourselves on our own.

“The noble ones have freed themselves from ill effects of both sorts, which is why suffering and stress can’t overcome them.”

16. STILL MORE INSPIRED WORDS

“When a person has shaved his hair and beard and put on the ochre robe, that’s the symbol of his state as a monk. But it counts only on the external level. Only when he has shaved off the mental tangle—all lower preoccupations—from his heart can you call him a monk on the internal level.

“When a head has been shaved, little creeping insects like lice can’t take up residence there. In the same way, when a mind has gained release from its preoccupations and is freed from fabrication, suffering can’t take up residence at all. When this becomes your normal state, you can be called a genuine monk.”

17. WHAT BUDDHO IS LIKE

Luang Pu was invited to teach in Bangkok on March 31, 1978. During a Dhamma conversation, some lay people expressed their doubts about what “*buddho*” was like. Luang Pu was kind enough to answer:

“When you meditate, don’t send your mind outside. Don’t fasten onto any knowledge at all. Whatever knowledge you’ve gained from books or teachers, don’t bring it in to complicate things. Cut away all preoccupations, and then as you meditate let all your knowledge come from what’s going on in the mind. When the mind is quiet, you’ll know it for yourself. But you have to keep meditating a lot. When the time comes for things to develop, they’ll develop on their own. Whatever you know, have it come from your own mind.

The knowledge that comes from a mind that’s quiet is extremely subtle and profound. So let your knowledge come out of a mind quiet and still.

*Have the mind give rise to a single preoccupation. Don’t send it outside. Let the mind stay right in the mind. Let the mind meditate on its own. Let it be the one that keeps repeating *buddho, buddho*. And then genuine *buddho* will appear in the mind. You’ll know for yourself what *buddho* is like. That’s all there is to it. There’s not a whole lot....”*

(Transcribed from a tape)

18. FOR THOSE WHO WANT SOMETHING GOOD

In early September, 1983, the Housewives Association of the Interior Ministry, led by Mrs. Juap Jirarote, came to the Northeast to do some charity work. One evening they took the opportunity to stop by and pay their respects to Luang Pu at 6:20 p.m.

After they had paid their respects and asked after his health, they received some amulets from him. Seeing that he wasn't feeling well, though, they quickly left. But there was one lady who stayed behind and took this special opportunity to ask Luang Pu, "I'd like something good [a euphemism for an amulet] from Luang Pu, too."

Luang Pu replied, "You have to meditate to get something good. When you meditate, your mind will be at peace. Your words and deeds will be at peace. Your words and deeds will be good. When you live in a good way like this, you'll be happy."

The lady replied, "I have lots of duties, and no time to meditate. My government work has me all tied up, so where am I going to find any time to meditate?"

Luang Pu explained,

"If you have time to breathe, you have time to meditate."

19. HE DOES, BUT HE DOESN'T

In 1979, Luang Pu went to Chantaburi to rest and to visit with Ajaan Somchai. On that occasion, a senior monk from Bangkok—Phra Dhammavaralankan of Wat Buppharam, the ecclesiastical head of the southern region of the country—was also there, practicing meditation in his old age, being only one year younger than Luang Pu. When he learned that Luang Pu was a meditation monk, he became interested and engaged Luang Pu in a long conversation on the results of meditation. He mentioned his responsibilities, saying that he had wasted a lot of his life engaged in study and administration work well into his old age. He discussed different points of meditation practice with Luang Pu, finally asking him, “Do you still have any anger?”

Luang Pu immediately answered,

“I do, but I don’t pick it up.”

20. AWARE IN TIME

When Luang Pu was undergoing treatment at Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok, large numbers of people came to pay their respects and listen to his Dhamma. Mr. Bamrungsak Kongsuk was among those who were interested in the practice of meditation. He was a student of Ajaan Sanawng of Wat Sanghadana in Nonthaburi province, one of the strict meditation centers of our day and time. He broached the topic of the practice of the Dhamma by asking, “Luang Pu, how does one cut off anger?”

Luang Pu answered,

“There’s nobody who cuts it off. There’s only being aware of it in time. When you’re aware of it in time, it disappears on its own.”

21. CUTTING NO SLACK

Many monks and novices attending to Luang Pu late at night in Chulalongkorn Hospital were perplexed and amazed when they noticed that on some nights, well after 1:00 a.m., they could hear Luang Pu explaining the Dhamma for about ten minutes and then chanting a blessing, as if there were large numbers of listeners right in front of him. At first, no one dared ask him about this, but after it had happened many times they couldn't contain their doubts, and so they asked.

Luang Pu told them,

“These doubts and questions are not the path for practicing the Dhamma.”

22. FRUGAL WITH HIS WORDS

A large group of Dhamma practitioners from Buriram province—headed by Police Lieutenant Bunchai Sukhontamat, the provincial prosecutor—came to pay their respects to Luang Pu, to listen to the Dhamma, and to ask questions about how to progress further in their practice. Most of them had practiced with all the famous ajaans, who had explained the practice in a variety of ways that weren't always in line with one another, and this had caused them more and more doubts. So they asked Luang Pu's advice as to the way of practice that was correct and easiest, as they had difficulties in finding time to practice. If they could learn of a way that was really easy, it would be especially right for them.

Luang Pu answered,

“Watch the mind right at the mind.”

23. SIMPLE, BUT HARD TO DO

The group of Duangporn Tharichat from the Air Force Radio Station 01 in Bang Syy, headed by Akhom Thannithate, came to the northeast to present group donations and to pay their respects to the ajaans in the various monasteries. When they stopped off to pay respect to Luang Pu, they presented their donations and received small mementos. After that, some of them went shopping in the market, while some of them found a place to rest. However, there was one group of about four or five people who stayed behind and asked Luang Pu to advise them on a simple method to get rid of mental distress and depression, which was a constant problem for them. What method, they asked, would give the quickest results?

Luang Pu answered,

“Don’t send your mind outside.”

24. THROW IT AWAY

A lady professor, after hearing Luang Pu give a talk on Dhamma practice, asked him the proper way to “wear suffering” [the Thai idiom for observing a period of mourning]. She continued, “These days, people don’t wear suffering in the correct way or in line with a common pattern, even though King Rama VI established a good standard in the time of his reign. When a member of your immediate family or a senior member of your extended family died, the pattern was to wear suffering for seven days, 50 days, or 100 days. But nowadays people don’t follow any pattern. So I’d like to ask you: What is the correct way to wear suffering?”

Luang Pu answered,

“Suffering is something to be comprehended. When you comprehend it, you let it go. Why would you want to wear it?”

25. A TRUTH IN LINE WITH THE TRUTH

A Chinese lady, after paying her respects to Luang Pu, asked him, “I have to move to Prakhonchai District in Buriram Province to set up a store near my relatives there. The problem is, my relatives have been recommending that I sell this, that, and the other thing in the store, in line with their opinion as to what would sell well, but I can’t make up my mind as to what would be good to sell. So I’ve come to ask your advice as to what would be good for me to sell.”

Luang Pu answered,

“Anything is good to sell, as long as there are people to buy it.”

26. THAT WASN'T HIS AIM

On May 8, 1979, a group of ten or more army officers came to pay their respects to Luang Pu quite late in the evening before heading on to Bangkok. Two of the members of the group had the rank of Lieutenant General. After conversing with Luang Pu for a while, the members of the group took the amulets from around their necks and placed them in a tray for Luang Pu to bless with the power of his concentration. He obliged them, and then returned their amulets to them. One of the generals asked him, "I've heard that you've made many sets of amulets. Which of them are famous?"

Luang Pu answered,

"None of them are famous."

27. WORLDS APART

A group of three or four young men from a distant province came to see Luang Pu as he was sitting on the porch of the meeting hall. You could tell from their behavior—in the casual way they sat and spoke—that they were probably familiar with a rogue monk someplace. On top of that, they seemed to believe that Luang Pu was interested in talismans, for they told him of all the great tantric ajaans who had given them talismans of extraordinary magical power. Finally, they pulled out their talismans to display to one another right there in front of him. One of them had a tusk of a wild boar, another a tiger's fang, another a rhinoceros horn. Each of them claimed extraordinary powers for his talisman, so one of them asked Luang Pu, "Hey, Luang Pu. Which of these is more extraordinary and good than the others for sure?"

Luang Pu seemed especially amused and said with a smile,

"None of them are good, none of them are extraordinary at all. They all come from common animals."

28. ONE THING ONLY

Luang Pu once said, “In the Rains Retreat of 1952 I made a vow to read the entire Canon to see where the endpoint of the Buddha’s teachings lay—to see where the end of the noble truths, the end of suffering, lay—to see how the Buddha had summarized it. I read the Canon to the end, contemplating along the way, but there was no passage that made contact deeply enough in the mind that I could say for sure, ‘This is the end of suffering. This is the end of the paths and fruitions, or what’s called nibbāna.’

“Except for one passage. Ven. Sāriputta had just come out of the attainment of the cessation, and the Buddha asked him, ‘Sāriputta, your skin is especially bright, your complexion especially clear. What is the dwelling place of your mind?’

“Ven. Sāriputta answered, ‘My mind’s dwelling place is emptiness.’

“That’s the one thing that made contact with my mind.”

29. WHAT TO STUDY AND WHAT NOT TO STUDY

Ven. Ajaan Suchin Suciṇṇo had received his law degree from Dhammasaat University a long time ago and held the practice of the Dhamma in high regard. He was a student of Luang Pu Lui for many years and then, after hearing of Luang Pu Dune's reputation, came to practice with him. Eventually he took ordination. After staying with Luang Pu for a while, he came to take his leave so that he could wander off in search of solitude.

Luang Pu advised him,

“In the area of the Vinaya, you should study the texts until you correctly understand each and every rule to the point where you can put them into practice without error. As for the Dhamma, if you read a lot you'll speculate a lot, so you don't have to read that at all. Be intent solely on the practice, and that will be enough.”

30. WHAT TO WATCH

Luang Taa Naen ordained well after middle age. Illiterate and unable to speak a word of Central Thai, he had his strong point in that he was well-intentioned, tractable, and diligent in his duties, to the point where you couldn't fault him. When he saw other monks taking their leave to go wandering or to study with other ajaans, he decided that he wanted to go, too. So he came to ask permission to leave, which Luang Pu granted. But then he felt worried: "I can't read, I don't know their language. How will I be able to practice with them?"

Luang Pu advised him,

"The practice isn't a matter of the letters of the alphabet or of spoken words. The fact that you know you don't know is a good place to start. The way to practice is this: In the area of the Vinaya, watch their example, the example set by the ajaan. Don't deviate in any way from what he does. In the area of the Dhamma, keep watch right at your own mind. Practice right at the mind. When you understand your own mind, that, in and of itself, will make you understand everything else."

31. PROBLEMS & RESPONSIBILITIES

One of the problems in administering the Saṅgha, in addition to having to deal with all the other major and minor issues that come up, is the lack of monks who will be abbots. We sometimes hear news of monks competing to become abbot of a monastery, but Luang Pu's students had to be cajoled or forced into taking on the abbotship in other monasteries. Every year without exception, groups of lay people would come to Luang Pu, asking him to send one of his students to become the abbot at their monastery. If Luang Pu saw that a particular monk should go, he would plead with him to go, but for the most part the monk wouldn't want to go. The usual excuse was, "I don't know how to do construction work, I don't know how to train other monks, I don't know how to give sermons, I'm no good at public relations or receiving guests. That's why I don't want to go."

Luang Pu would respond,

"Those things aren't really necessary. Your only responsibility is to follow your daily duties: going for alms, eating your meal, sitting in meditation, doing walking meditation, cleaning the monastery grounds, being strict in observing the Vinaya. That's enough right there. As for construction work, that depends on the lay supporters. Whether or not they do it is up to them."

32. THE POORER, THE HAPPIER

To the end of his life, Luang Pu would have his daily warm-water bath at 5:00 every evening, assisted by a monk or novice. After he had dried off and was feeling refreshed, he would often speak a few words of Dhamma that occurred to him at the time. For instance, once he said,

“We monks, if we establish in ourselves a sense of satisfaction with our status as monks, will find nothing but happiness and peace. But if we have the status of a monk and yet hanker after any other status, we’ll be engulfed in suffering all the time. When you can stop thirsting, stop searching, that’s the true state of being a monk. When you’re truly a monk, the poorer you are, the more happiness you have.”

33. THE LESS, THE BETTER

“Even if you’ve read the whole Canon and can remember lots of teachings; even if you can explain them in poignant ways, with lots of people to respect you; even if you build a lot of monastery buildings, or can explain inconstancy, stress, and not-self in the most detailed fashion—if you’re still heedless, you haven’t tasted the flavor of the teachings in any way at all, for those other things are all external. The purposes they serve are all external: as a benefit to society, a benefit to other people, a benefit to posterity, or a symbol of the religion. The only thing that serves your own true purpose is release from suffering.

“And you’ll be able to gain release from suffering only when you know the one mind.”

34. DIDN'T THINK OF THAT

In one of Luang Pu's branch meditation monasteries there lived a group of five or six monks who wanted to be especially strict in their practice, so they made a vow not to talk throughout the Rains Retreat. In other words, no word would come out of their mouths except for the daily chanting and the bi-weekly Pāṭimokkha chant. After the end of the Rains they came to pay their respects to Luang Pu and told him of their strict practice: In addition to their other duties, they were also able to stop speaking for the entire Rains.

Luang Pu smiled a bit and said,

“That's pretty good. When there's no speaking, then no faults are committed by way of speech. But when you say that you stopped speaking, that simply can't be. Only the noble ones who enter the refined attainment of cessation, where feeling and perception stop, are able to stop speaking. Aside from them, everyone's speaking all day and all night long. And especially those who vow not to speak: They talk more than anyone else, simply that they don't make a sound that others can hear.”

35. DON'T AIM IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

In addition to the wisdom that came straight from his heart, Luang Pu would also quote passages from his having read the Canon. Any passage that he saw as important, as a short and direct lesson in the practice, he would repeat to us. For instance, one of the Buddha's teachings that he liked to quote was this: "Monks, this holy life is not practiced for the sake of deceiving the public, nor for the sake of gaining their respect, nor for the sake of gains, offerings, and fame; nor for the sake of defeating other sectarians. This holy life is lived for the sake of restraint, abandoning, dispassion, and the cessation of suffering."

Luang Pu would then add,

"Those who ordain and those who practice have to aim in this direction. Any directions other than this are all wrong."

36. IN THE BUDDHA'S WORDS

Luang Pu once said, "People, as long as they're run-of-the-mill, have their pride and their opinions. As long as they have pride, it's hard for them to see in line with one another. When their views aren't in line with one another, it causes them to keep quarreling and disputing. As for a noble one who has reached the Dhamma, he has nothing to bring him into a quarrel with anyone else. However other people see things, he lets it go as their business. As in one of the Buddha's sayings,

"Monks, whatever the wise people of the world say exists, I too say exists. And whatever the wise people of the world say doesn't exist, I too say that it doesn't exist. I don't quarrel with the world; the world quarrels with me."

37. THOSE WITH NO FAULT BY WAY OF SPEECH

On February 21, 1983, when Luang Pu was seriously ill and staying at the Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok, Luang Pu Saam Ākiñcano came to visit him in the hospital room. At that time, Luang Pu was resting. Luang Pu Saam sat down near him and raised his hands in respect. Luang Pu responded by raising his hands in respect. Then the two of them sat there, perfectly still, for a long time. Finally, after an extremely long time, Luang Pu Saam raised his hands in respect once more and said, "I'll be leaving now."

"OK," Luang Pu responded.

For the entire two hours, those were the only words I heard them say. After Luang Pu Saam left, I couldn't help but ask Luang Pu, "Luang Pu Saam came and sat here for a long time. Why didn't you say anything to him?"

Luang Pu responded,

"The task is done, so there's no need to say anything more."

38. THE PERFECTION OF ENDURANCE

During all the many years I lived near Luang Pu, I never saw him act in a way to indicate that he was bothered by anything to the point where he couldn't stand it, and I never heard him complain about any difficulty at all. For example, when he was the senior monk at a function, he never made a fuss or demanded that the hosts alter things to suit him. Whenever he was invited any place where he had to sit for long periods of time or where the weather was hot and humid, he never complained. When he was sick and in pain, or if his food came late, no matter how hungry he was, he never grumbled. If the food was bland and tasteless, he never asked for anything to spice it up. On the other hand, if he saw any other elder monk making a fuss to get special treatment from other people, he would comment,

“You can't endure even this little thing? If you can't endure this, how are you going to win out over defilement and craving?”

39. NO TROUBLE THROUGH HIS WORDS

Luang Pu was pure in his speech, for he would speak only of things that served a purpose. He never created any trouble for himself or for others through his words. Even when people tried to bait him so that they could hear him criticize others, he wouldn't fall for the bait.

Many were the times when people would come to say to him, "Luang Pu, why is it that some of our nationally renowned preachers like to attack others or denounce society or criticize other senior monks? Even if you paid me, I couldn't respect monks like that."

Luang Pu would respond,

"That's the level of their knowledge and understanding. They say what comes easily in line with the level of their knowledge. Nobody's paying you to respect them. If you don't want to respect them, then don't respect them. They probably won't mind."

40. MONKS WHO VICTIMIZE SPIRITS

Generally speaking, Luang Pu liked to encourage monks and novices to take a special interest in the practice of wandering in the forest to meditate and observe the ascetic practices. Once, when a large number of his students—both senior and junior—came for a meeting, he encouraged them to search for seclusion in the wilderness, living on mountains or in caves for the purpose of accelerating their practice. That way they'd be able to release themselves from their lower states of mind.

One of the monks said thoughtlessly, "I don't dare go to those places, sir. I'm afraid that spirits might victimize me."

Luang Pu shot right back,

"Where have there ever been any spirits who victimize monks? There are only monks who victimize spirits—and they make a big production of it to boot. Think about it. Nearly all the material things lay people bring to donate are for the sake of dedicating the merit to the spirits of their dead ancestors and relatives: their parents, their grandparents, their brothers and sisters. And do we monks behave in a fitting way? What mental qualities do we have that will send the merit to those spirits? Be careful that you don't become a monk who victimizes spirits."

41. NICE, BUT...

At present there are a lot of meditators who get enthusiastic about new teachers or new meditation centers. Just as lottery enthusiasts get excited about monks who forecast lottery numbers, or amulet enthusiasts get excited about monks who make powerful amulets, in the same way, vipassanā enthusiasts get excited about vipassanā teachers. A lot of these people, when taken with a particular teacher, will praise that teacher to others and try to persuade them to share their opinion and respect for the teacher. And especially at present, there are famous speakers who tape their Dhamma talks and sell them all over the country. One woman once brought many tapes of a famous speaker's talks for Luang Pu to listen to, but he didn't listen to them. One reason was that he had never had a radio or tape player since the day he was born. Or supposing that he had had one, he wouldn't have known how to turn it on. Later, someone brought a tape player and played many of these tapes for Luang Pu to listen to. Afterwards, she asked him what he thought. He said,

“Nice. He has a beautiful way of expressing himself, and an abundance of words, but I couldn't find any substance to them. Each time you listen, you should be able to get the flavor of study, practice, and attainment. That's when there's substance.”

42. MEDITATORS WHO ARE UNCERTAIN

At present, many people who are interested in meditation practice are extremely confused and doubtful about the correct way to practice. This is especially true of people just beginning to get interested, because meditation teachers often give conflicting advice on how to practice. What's worse, instead of explaining things in a fair and objective way, these teachers seem reluctant to admit that other teachers or methods of practice might also be correct. There are not a few who show actual disdain for other methods.

Because many people with these sorts of doubts would often come to ask Luang Pu's advice, I frequently heard him explain things in this way:

“When you start practicing meditation, you can begin with any method at all, because they all lead to the same results. The reason there are so many methods is because people have different tendencies. This is why there have to be different images to focus on or words to repeat—such as “buddho” or “arahang”—as means of giving the mind a point around which to gather and settle down as the first step. When the mind has gathered and is still, the meditation word will fall away on its own, and that's where every method falls into the same track, with the same flavor. In other words, it has discernment as its surpassing state, and release as its essence.”

43. WHEN DWELLING, DWELL ABOVE

Everyone who came to pay respect to Luang Pu would say the same thing: Even though he was almost 100 years old, his complexion was bright and his health strong. Even those of us who lived near him all along rarely saw his face darken or look exhausted or get furrowed in displeasure or pain. His normal state was to be quiet and cheerful at all times. He had few illnesses and was always in a good mood, never excited about events or affected by praise or blame.

Once, in the midst of a gathering of elder meditation monks who were conversing about how to characterize the normal state of mind of those who live above suffering, Luang Pu said,

“Not worrying, not being attached: That’s the mental dwelling of those who practice.”

44. LOOKING FOR NEW TEACHERS

People practicing the Dhamma at present are of two sorts. The first are those who, when they learn the principles of the practice or receive advice from a teacher and get on the path, are intent on trying to follow that path to the utmost of their ability. The other sort are those who—even though they've received good advice from their teacher and have learned the correct principles of the practice—aren't sincerely intent. Their efforts are lax. At the same time, they like to go out looking for other teachers at other centers. Wherever they hear there's a good center, there they go. Meditators of this sort are many.

Luang Pu once advised his students,

“When you go to a lot of centers and study with a lot of teachers, your practice won't get results, for when you go to a lot of centers, it's as if you go back to the beginning over and over again. You don't gain any sure principles in your practice. Sometimes you get uncertain and bewildered. Your mind isn't solid. Your practice degenerates and doesn't progress.”

45. HOLDING ON VS. PUTTING ASIDE

Students and practitioners of the Dhamma are of two sorts. The first sort are those who genuinely study and practice to gain release from suffering. The second are those who study and practice to brag about their accomplishments and to pass their days in arguments, believing that memorizing a lot of texts or being able to quote a lot of teachers is a sign of their importance. Many times, when people of this second sort came to see Luang Pu, instead of asking his advice on how to practice, they would spray out their knowledge and ideas for him to hear in great detail. Still, he was always able to sit and listen to them. In fact, when they had finished, he would add one more comment to theirs:

“Those who are obsessed with scriptures and teachers won’t be able to gain release from suffering. But still, those who want to gain release from suffering do have to depend on scriptures and teachers.”

46. WHEN THE MIND RESISTS GROWING STILL

In practicing concentration, there's no way everyone will get results at the same speed. Some people get fast results, others get slow results. There are even those who never seem to gain a taste of stillness at all. Still, they shouldn't get discouraged. The act of making an effort in the area of the heart is, in itself, a higher form of merit and skill than the act of giving gifts or observing the precepts. A large number of Luang Pu's students would ask him, "I've been trying to practice concentration for a long time, but my mind has never been still. It keeps wandering off outside. Is there another way I might be able to practice?"

Luang Pu would sometimes recommend this other method:

"When the mind isn't still, you can at least make sure it doesn't wander off far. Use your mindfulness to stay mindful solely of the body. Look to see it as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Develop the perception of its being unattractive, with nothing of any substance to it at all. When the mind sees clearly in this way, it will give rise to a sense of dismay, disenchantment, and dispassion. This, too, can cut through the clinging-aggregates."

47. THE GENUINE BASIS OF THE DHAMMA

There's one thing that meditators love to talk about, and that's, "What do you see when you sit in meditation? What appears when you meditate?" Or else they complain that they've been sitting in meditation for a long time and yet nothing has appeared for them to see. Or else they talk about seeing this thing or that all the time. This makes some people misunderstand things, thinking that when you meditate you get to see what you want to see.

Luang Pu would warn these people that this sort of aspiration is all wrong, for the purpose of meditation is to enter into the genuine basis of the Dhamma.

"The genuine basis of the Dhamma is the mind, so focus on watching the mind. Get so that you understand your own mind poignantly. When you understand your mind poignantly, you've got the basis of the Dhamma right there."

48. A WARNING NOT TO BE HEEDLESS

To ward off any heedlessness or carelessness in the behavior of his monks and novices, Luang Pu would choose a poignant way of reprimanding them:

“Lay people work hard at their living with lots of difficulties so that they can gain the material things, the food and the money they need to support their families, their children and grandchildren. No matter how tired or exhausted they are, they have to keep struggling. At the same time, they want to gain merit, which is why they sacrifice some of their belongings to make merit. They get up early in the morning to fix good food to put in our alms bowls. Before they put the food in our bowls, they lift it above their heads and make a wish. When they’ve finished putting the food in the bowl, they back away, squat down, and raise their hands in respect once more. They do this because they want merit from supporting our practice.

“And what merit is there in our practice that we can give to them? Have you behaved yourself in a way that you deserve to receive their food and eat it?”

49. SOMETIMES HE CAME DOWN HARD

Ajaan Samret had ordained from when he was a child until he was almost 60 years old. He had been a meditation teacher, strict in his practice, good in his reputation, and respected by many people. But he didn't make it all the way. His state of mind deteriorated because he fell in love with the daughter of one of his supporters. So he came to take his leave of Luang Pu in order to disrobe and get married.

Everyone was shocked at this news and didn't believe it could possibly be true because, looking at his practice, they had assumed he would stay in the contemplative life to the end of his days. If the news were true, it would be a major blow to the meditative community. For this reason, fellow elders and his students tried everything they could to get him to change his mind and not disrobe. In particular, Luang Pu called for him and tried to talk him out of his plans, but to no effect. Finally, Ajaan Samret said to him, "I can't stay on. Every time I sit and meditate, I see her face floating right in front of me."

Luang Pu responded in a loud voice,

"That's because you aren't meditating on your own mind. You're meditating on her rear, so of course you're going to keep seeing her rear. Get out of here. Feel free to go wherever you want."

50. NOT SIDETRACKED

I lived with Luang Pu for more than thirty years, attending to his needs all the way to the end of his life, and I observed that his practice was right in line with the Dhamma and Vinaya, right in line with the path that leads solely to release from suffering. He never got sidetracked into magical spells, sacred talismans, or any other dubious activities, not even the least little bit. When people asked him to bless them by blowing on their heads, he'd ask, "Why should I blow on your head?" When people asked him to put an auspicious mark on their car, he'd say, "Why put an auspicious mark?" When people asked him to determine an auspicious day or month for their activities, he'd say, "All days are good." Or if he were chewing betel and people would ask for the chewed remains, he'd say,

"Why would you want that? It's dirty."

51. SIMPLY A MOTION

There were times when I felt ill at ease, fearing that I may have done wrong in being party to those who talked Luang Pu into doing things that he wasn't interested in doing. The first time was when he joined in the opening ceremonies for the Phra Ajaan Mun Museum in Wat Pa Sutthaavaat in Sakon Nakhorn. There were lots of meditation teachers and lots of lay people who went to the teachers to pay respect and ask for favors. Many people asked Luang Pu to blow on their heads. When I saw him just sitting there without responding, I pleaded with him, "Please just do it to get it over with." So he blew on their heads. After a while, when he couldn't get out of it, he'd make auspicious marks on their cars. When he grew tired of their requests for amulets, he allowed them to make amulets in his name. When he felt pity on them, he'd light the "victory" candle at their chanting rituals and join in their ceremonies for consecrating amulets.

But then I felt extremely relieved when Luang Pu said,

"My doing things like this is simply an external physical motion in line with social norms. It's not a motion of the mind that leads to states of becoming, levels of being, or to the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna in any way at all."

52. SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

“All 84,000 sections of the Dhamma are simply strategies for getting people to turn and look at the mind. The Buddha’s teachings are many because people’s defilements are many. Still, the way to put an end to suffering is only one: nibbāna. This opportunity we have to practice the Dhamma rightly is very rare. If we let it pass by, we’ll have no chance of gaining release in this lifetime, and we’ll have to get lost in wrong views for a long, long time before we can meet up with this very same Dhamma again. So now that we’ve met with the Buddha’s teachings, we should hurry up and practice to gain release. Otherwise, we’ll miss this good opportunity. When the noble truths are forgotten, darkness will overwhelm beings with a mass of suffering for a long time to come.”

53. THE LIMITS OF SCIENCE

It wasn't just once that Luang Pu taught the Dhamma using comparisons. Once he said,

“External discernment is the discernment of suppositions. It can't enlighten the mind about nibbāna. You have to depend on the discernment of the noble path if you're going to enter nibbāna. The knowledge of scientists, like Einstein, is well informed and very capable. It can split the smallest atom and enter into the fourth dimension. But Einstein had no idea of nibbāna, which was why he couldn't enter nibbāna.

“Only the mind that has been enlightened in the noble path can lead to real Awakening, full Awakening, complete Awakening. Only that can lead to release from suffering, to nibbāna.”

54. HOW TO EXTINGUISH SUFFERING

In 1977 a lot of undesirable events overwhelmed the senior officials in the Interior Ministry—loss of wealth, loss of status, criticism, and suffering. And of course, the pain and sorrow spread to affect their wives and children as well. So one day some of their wives came to pay respect to Luang Pu and told him of their suffering so that he might advise them on how to overcome it.

He told them,

“One shouldn’t feel sad or miss things external to the body that are past and gone, for those things have performed their function correctly in the most consummate way.”

55. THE TRUTH IS ALWAYS THE SAME

Many well-read people would comment that Luang Pu's teachings were very similar to those of Zen or the Platform Sutra. I asked him about this many times, and finally he replied in an impersonal way,

“All the truths of the Dhamma are already present in the world. When the Buddha awakened to those truths, he brought them out to teach to the beings of the world. Now, because those beings had different propensities—coarse or refined—he had to use up a lot of words: 84,000 sections of Dhamma in all. When wise people try to select the words best suited to explain the truth to those who aim at the truth, they have to use the methods of the truth that, on reflection, are the most correct and complete, without worrying about the words or getting fixated on the letters of the texts in the least way at all.”

56. REFINED

Ajaan Bate of Khoke Mawn Forest Monastery came to converse with Luang Pu about the practice of concentration, saying, “I’ve been practicing concentration for a long time, to the point where I can enter fixed penetration (*appanā samādhi*) for long periods. When I leave meditation, there are times when I feel a rapturous sense of ease long afterwards. Sometimes there’s a sense of bright light, and I can fully understand the body. Is there anything else I should do next?”

Luang Pu answered,

“Use the power of that fixed penetration to examine the mind. Then let go of all preoccupations so that there’s nothing left at all.”

57. EMPTY

At a later time, Ajaan Bate, together with two other monks and a large number of lay people, came to pay respect to Luang Pu. After Luang Pu had advised the newcomers on how to do the practice, Ajaan Bate questioned Luang Pu further on the advice he had received on his last visit. "Letting go of all objects is something I can do only momentarily," he said. "I can't stay that way for long periods of time."

Luang Pu said,

"Even if you can let go of all objects for a moment, if you aren't really observant of the mind, or your mindfulness isn't completely all-around, it may be that you've simply let go of a blatant object to move to a more refined object. So you have to stop all thoughts and let the mind settle on nothingness."

58. NOT ALL THAT CLEAR

Someone said: “I’ve read the passage in your biography where it says that, while you were wandering, you came to a good understanding about the issue of the mind concocting defilements and defilements concocting the mind. What does that mean?”

Luang Pu answered,

“The mind concocting defilements’ refers to the mind’s forcing thoughts, words, and deeds to make external things come into being, making them good, making them bad, giving rise to the results of kamma, and then latching onto those things, thinking, ‘That’s me. That’s my self. That’s mine. That’s theirs.’

“Defilements concocting the mind’ refers to external things coming in to force the mind in line with their power, so that it fastens on to the idea that it has a self, assuming things that keep deviating from the truth.”

59. KNOWLEDGE FROM STUDY VS. KNOWLEDGE FROM PRACTICE

Someone said: “The teachings about virtue, concentration, discernment, and release that I’ve memorized from books and from the teachings of various ajaans: Are they in line with Luang Pu’s understanding of their essence?”

Luang Pu answered,

“Virtue means the normalcy of a mind that’s free of faults, the mind that has armored itself against doing evil of any kind. Concentration is the result that comes from maintaining that virtue, i.e. a mind with solidity, with stillness as the strength sending it on to the next step. Discernment—“what knows”—is a mind empty, light, and at ease, seeing things clearly, all the way through, for what they really are. Release is a mind that enters emptiness from that emptiness. In other words, it lets go of the ease, leaving a state where it is nothing and has nothing, with no thought remaining at all.”

60. A STRATEGY FOR LOOSENING ATTACHMENT

Someone said: “When I bring the mind to stillness, I try to keep it firmly in that stillness. But when it meets up with an object or preoccupation, it keeps tending to lose the foundation I’ve been trying to maintain.”

Luang Pu responded,

“If that’s the way it is, then it shows that your concentration isn’t resilient enough. If these preoccupations are especially strong—and in particular, if they concern your weak points—you have to deal with them using the methods of insight. Start out by contemplating the coarsest natural phenomenon—the body—analyzing it down to its details. When you’ve contemplated it so that it’s perfectly clear, move on to contemplating mental phenomena—anything at all, in pairs, that you’ve ever analyzed, such as black and white, or dark and bright.”

61. ON EATING

A group of monks came to pay their respects to Luang Pu before the Rains Retreat and one of them said, “I’ve been meditating for a long time and have attained some peace, but I have this problem about eating meat. Even just looking at meat, I feel sorry for the animal to whom the meat belonged, that it had to sacrifice its life simply for me to consume it. It’s as if I really lack compassion. When I start worrying about this, I find it hard to bring my mind to peace.”

Luang Pu said,

“When a monk partakes of the four requisites, he should contemplate them first. If, on contemplating, he sees that eating meat is a form of oppression and shows a lack of compassion for animals, he should abstain from eating meat and eat vegetarian food instead.”

62. MORE ON EATING

About three or four months later, the same group of monks came to pay their respects to Luang Pu after the Rains Retreat and told him, “We ate vegetarian food throughout the rains, but it was very difficult. The lay people where we were staying in Khoke Klaang village, Praasaat district, knew nothing about vegetarian food. We had trouble finding any, and it was troublesome for the people who were supporting us. Some of the monks ended up in poor health, and some of us almost didn’t make it all the way through the Rains Retreat. We weren’t able to put as much effort into our meditation as we should have.”

Luang Pu said,

“When a monk partakes of the four requisites, he should contemplate them first. If, on contemplating, he sees that the food in front of him—whether it’s vegetables, meat, fish, or rice—is pure in three ways in that he hasn’t seen or heard or suspected that an animal was killed to provide the food specifically for him, and also that he himself obtained the food in an ethical way, that the lay people donated it out of faith, then he should go ahead and eat that food. This is how our teachers have practiced as well.”

63. STILL MORE ON EATING

On the second day of the waning moon in the third month of 1979, Luang Pu was staying at Prakhonchai Forest Monastery. After 8 p.m. a group of monks who liked to wander around, pitching their tents near populated areas, came to the monastery to spend the night there, too. After paying their respects to Luang Pu, they talked about what they felt was the outstanding feature of their practice, saying, “Those who eat meat are supporting the killing of animals. Those who eat only vegetables show a high degree of compassion. The proof of this is that when you convert to eating just vegetables, the mind becomes more peaceful and cool.”

Luang Pu responded,

“That’s very good. The fact that you can be vegetarians is very good, and I’d like to express my admiration. As for those who still eat meat, if that meat is pure in three ways—in that they haven’t seen or heard or suspected that an animal was killed to provide the food specifically for them—and they obtained it in a pure way, then eating the meat is in no way against the Dhamma and Vinaya. But when you say that your mind becomes peaceful and cool, that’s the result of the strength that comes from being intent on practicing correctly in line with the Dhamma and Vinaya. It has nothing to do with the new food or old in your stomach at all.”

64. BUSINESS PRACTICES & DHAMMA PRACTICE

A group of merchants said, “We have our duties as merchants, which means that sometimes we have to exaggerate things or take excessive profits, but we’re extremely interested in practicing concentration and have already started practicing. Some people have told us, though, that, with our livelihood, we can’t practice meditation. What do you say about this, Luang Pu? For they say that selling for a profit is a sin.”

Luang Pu said,

“In order to survive, every person needs an occupation, and every occupation has its own norms of what’s right and appropriate. When you follow those norms in a proper way, that counts as neutral—not meritorious, not sinful. As for practicing the Dhamma, that’s something you should do, for only those who practice the Dhamma are fit to work in all circumstances.”

65. BURIED MEMORIES

Once when Luang Pu was staying at Yothaaprasit Forest Monastery, a large number of monks and novices came to pay their respects. After they had listened to his teachings, Luang Taa Ploi—who had ordained when he was old but was well restrained in his practice—said to Luang Pu, “I’ve ordained for a fairly long time now, but I can’t yet cut my attachments to the past. No matter how firmly I set my mind on the present, I find that mindfulness lapses and I keep slipping back. Could you tell me another method to stop this sort of thing?”

Luang Pu responded,

“Don’t let the mind run out after external preoccupations. If your mindfulness lapses, then as soon as you’re aware of it, immediately pull it back. Don’t let it go looking into preoccupations that are good or bad, pleasant or painful. Don’t fall in line with them, but don’t use force to cut them off.”

66. IN HIS OWN STYLE

Sometime around 1977, Luang Pu was invited to a celebration at Wat Dhammamongkon on Sukhumvit Road in Bangkok. During the celebration, he was invited to “sit in protection” as part of a consecration ceremony for Buddha images and amulets. After the ceremony was over, he went outside to rest in a small hut where he spoke with a large number of his monk-students who were studying in Bangkok at the time. One of the monks commented that he had never seen Luang Pu participate in a ceremony like this before, and wondered if this was his first time. He then went on to ask how one goes about sitting “in protection.”

Luang Pu replied,

“I have no idea what the other ajaans do when they’re sitting ‘in protection’ or sitting ‘in blessing.’ As for me, I simply sit in concentration in my same old style.”

67. "I WANT TO DO WELL IN MY STUDIES..."

A young girl once said to Luang Pu, "I heard Grandfather Sorasak Kawngsuk say that anyone who wants to be intelligent and do well in her studies should first practice sitting in meditation to get the mind concentrated in stillness. I want to be intelligent and do well in my studies, so I've been trying to meditate and bring my mind to stillness, but it's never been willing to grow still. Sometimes I get even more restless than before. When my mind doesn't grow still in this way, how can I do well in my studies?"

Luang Pu answered,

"Simply focus on knowing what it is that you're studying, and that in itself will help you do well in your studies. When the mind's not still, have it know that it's not still. It's because you want so much for it to be still that it's not still. Just keep at your meditation in a calm way, and the day will come it'll grow still in line with your wishes."

68. THE PURPOSE OF WANDERING

Some monks and novices, after the Rains Retreat, like to go off wandering in groups to various places. Each of them makes a big production out of preparing his requisites and a full set of dhutaṅga accessories. But many of them go in a manner that deviates from the purpose of wandering for seclusion. For instance, some of them wear their dhutaṅga accessories on air-conditioned coaches. Some go visiting their old friends in company offices.

So Luang Pu once said in the midst of a gathering of meditation monks,

“To make yourself a good-looking wandering monk isn’t proper at all. It goes against the purpose of going out to wander. Each of you should reflect a great deal on this. The purpose of wandering in meditation is only one thing: to train and polish the heart so that it’s free of defilements. To go wandering in meditation only in body, but without taking along the heart, is nothing excellent at all.”

69. TO STOP YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW

A meditator once said to Luang Pu, “I’ve been trying to stop thinking in line with what you’ve taught, but I’ve never been able to succeed. What’s worse is that I’ve gotten frustrated and my brain seems dazed. I’m convinced, though, that what you’ve taught isn’t wrong, so I’d like to ask for some advice on what to do next.”

Luang Pu responded,

“That shows that you’ve missed the point. You’re told to stop thinking, but all you do is think about stopping your thinking, so how can the actual stopping come about? Get rid of all your ignorance about stopping to think. Abandon your thoughts about stopping your thinking, and that’ll be the end of the matter.”

70. SIMILAR RESULTS, BUT NOT THE SAME

The second day of the waning moon of the eleventh month, Luang Pu's birthday, falls on the second day after the end of the Rains Retreat every year. So his students—both scholarly monks and practicing monks—liked to travel to pay their respects to him on that day, to ask his advice on the practice or to report the results of their practice from the preceding Rains. This is one tradition they observed as long as he was alive.

Once, after giving detailed advice on how to practice, Luang Pu ended with the following words,

“Studying the Dhamma by reading and listening results in perceptions and concepts. Studying the Dhamma by practicing it results in actual levels of Dhamma in the heart.”

71. THERE'S ONLY ONE PLACE

Phra Mahā Thaweesuk was the first of Luang Pu's students to pass the ninth and final level of the Pali exams. Thus, in Luang Pu's name, Wat Burapha sponsored a celebration of his achievement.

After Phra Mahā Thaweesuk had paid his respects to Luang Pu, Luang Pu gave him a short admonition:

“To be able to pass the ninth level exams shows that you're very industrious, sufficiently intelligent, and an expert in the Canon, for this counts as the completion of the study course. But to be interested just in study can't bring release from suffering. You have to be interested in the practice of training the mind as well.

“All 84,000 sections of the Dhamma came out of the Buddha's mind. Everything comes out of the mind. Whatever you want to know, you can look for it in the mind.”

72. THE WORLD VS. THE DHAMMA

On March 12, 1979, Luang Pu went to Sri Kaew Cave Monastery on Phu Phaen Mountain, Sakon Nakorn province, for more than ten days of solitude and rest. On the evening of the last day before he was to leave, Ajaan Suwat together with the other monks and novices in the monastery came to pay their respects.

Luang Pu commented, "It's been comfortable resting here. The air is good, and the meditation easy. It makes me think of the old days when I was wandering."

Then he gave a Dhamma talk, which included the following passage:

"That which can be known all belongs to the world. As for that which has no thing that can know it, that's the Dhamma. The world always has things that come in pairs, but the Dhamma is one thing all the way through."

73. SHOULD YOU ASK?

Many people interested in the practice, whether lay or ordained, are not only intent on their practice but also like to search out teachers who are skilled in giving advice.

Once a group of meditating monks from the central region of Thailand came to spend many days listening to Luang Pu's Dhamma and to his advice on meditation. One of the monks told Luang Pu of his feelings: "I've searched out many teachers, and although they all teach well, they generally teach just about the Vinaya, or the practicing of wandering and following the ascetic practices, or else the bliss and stillness that come from practicing concentration. But as for you, you teach the straight route to the top: not-self, emptiness, nibbāna. Forgive me for being so forward as to ask, but in teaching about nibbāna, have you attained it yet?"

Luang Pu answered,

"There's nothing that will attain, and nothing that won't attain."

74. THE PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICE

Ajaan Bate, a close relative of Luang Pu's, lived at Khoke Mawn Monastery. Even though he ordained only late in life, he was extremely strict in his practice of meditation and the ascetic practices. Luang Pu once praised him, saying that his practice had gotten good results. When Ajaan Bate fell seriously ill and was near death, he said that he wanted to see Luang Pu one last time, to bid him farewell before dying. I informed Luang Pu, who went to see him. On his arrival, Ajaan Bate got up and bowed down to him and then lay back on his sleeping mat as before, without saying a word. But his smile and the happy look on his face were easy to see.

Luang Pu said to him in a voice both clear and gentle,

“All the practices you’ve been trying to practice are specifically meant for use at this time. When the time comes to die, make the mind one, then stop focusing and let go of everything.”

75. HOPING FOR FAR-OFF RESULTS

When lay people came to visit Luang Pu, he ordinarily wouldn't ask them about anything far away. He'd usually ask, "Have you ever meditated?" Some would respond that they had, others that they hadn't.

One woman, a member of the latter group, was more outspoken than the rest. She said, "As I see it, there's no reason we have to go to all the trouble of meditating. Every year I hear the Mahachaad sermon [a long, poetic chant of the Buddha's penultimate life, as Prince Vessantara] at least 13 times at many different temples. The monks there say that listening to the Mahachaad story guarantees I'll be reborn in the time of the Buddha Sri Ariya Metteyya, where I'll meet with nothing but pleasure and ease. So why should I make things difficult for myself by meditating?"

Luang Pu said,

"Things that are excellent are right in front of your face, and yet you don't show any interest. Instead, you place your hopes on far-off things that are nothing but rumors. This is the mark of a person who's hopeless. When the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna of the dispensation of the Buddha Gotama are still with us, totally complete, and yet you dither around and don't show any interest in them, then when the dispensation of the Buddha Sri Ariya Metteyya comes, you'll dither around even more."

76. NOTHING MORE THAN THAT

Sometimes, when Luang Pu noticed that the people who came to practice with him were still uncommitted, still pining after the happiness and enjoyment of purely worldly things to the point where they weren't ready to let them go and practice the Dhamma, he'd give them a teaching to think about so as to see things clearly for what they are:

"I ask you all to examine happiness, to see exactly where was the point of greatest happiness in your life. When you really look at it, you'll see that it's just that—nothing more than anything else you've ever experienced. Why wasn't it more than that? Because the world has nothing more than that. That's all it has to offer—over and over again, nothing more than that at all. Just birth, aging, illness, and death, over and over again. There's got to be a happiness more extraordinary than that, more excellent than that, safer than that. This is why the noble ones sacrifice limited happiness in search of the happiness that comes from stilling the body, stilling the mind, stilling the defilements. That's the happiness that's safe, to which nothing else can compare."

77. IT'S EASY IF YOU'RE NOT ATTACHED

Wat Burapha, where Luang Pu spent each Rains Retreat without exception for more than 50 years, is situated in the heart of the town of Surin, right in front of the Provincial Offices and next to the provincial court. For this reason, the noise of cars and trucks was constantly disturbing the peace and quiet of the monastery. Especially during the annual Elephant Fair or any of the holidays, there would be noise and bright lights for seven or fifteen days at a time. The monks and novices whose minds still lacked resilience would be especially bothered by this.

Whenever they'd bring this to Luang Pu's attention, they'd always get the same response:

“Why waste your time being interested in those things? It's the nature of light to be bright. It's the nature of noise to be loud. That's what their functions are. If you don't focus on listening, that's the end of the matter. Act in a way that's not in opposition to your surroundings, for that's just the way they are. Simply reach a genuine understanding with them using deep discernment, that's all.”

78. SOMETIMES WHAT I HEARD AMAZED ME

One of my weaknesses was that I liked to talk with Luang Pu half in jest. This was because he never took offense, and was always approachable to the monks and novices who lived close to him. Once I asked him, “In the texts they say that devas came by the tens of billions to listen to the Buddha. Would there be enough space to hold them all? Was his voice loud enough for all of them to hear?”

When I heard Luang Pu’s answer I was stunned and amazed, for I had never read anything like it in the texts and had never heard anyone say such a thing before. On top of that, I heard him say this only when he was seriously ill and nearing death.

He said,

“There would be no problem even if the devas gathered by the millions of billions, for the space of one atom can hold up to eight devas.”

79. EVEN THIS SORT OF QUESTION

That insoluble problem that people—whether children or adults, intelligent or stupid—argue about uselessly and without ever coming to an agreement, is this: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? For the most part, they argue about this only in jest and can never come to any conclusion. Still, there were people who would bring this question to Luang Pu, thinking that he probably wouldn't answer a question of this sort. But eventually I heard him give an answer like nobody else's when one day Phra Berm came to massage his feet and asked him, "Luang Pu, which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

Luang Pu answered,

"They came at the same time."

80. A SCOLDING

There were times when Luang Pu seemed almost annoyed with people who, having hardly meditated at all, asked him how to push things along so that they could see results right away.

He would scold them,

“We practice for the purpose of restraint, for the purpose of abandoning, for the purpose of unraveling our desires, for the purpose of putting an end to suffering, not for the purpose of seeing heavenly mansions. We don’t even make it our goal to see nibbāna. Just keep on practicing calmly without wanting to see anything at all. After all, nibbāna is something empty, without shape. There’s no foundation to it, and nothing to which it can be compared. Only if you keep at the practice will you know for yourself.”

81. LETTING GO OF ONE THING TO GET STUCK ON ANOTHER

One of Luang Pu's lay students came to pay his respects and to report proudly on the results he had gained from his practice, saying, "I'm really glad to see you today because I've been practicing in line with your advice and have been getting results step by step. When I start meditating, I let go of all external perceptions, and the mind stops its turmoil. It gathers together, grows still, and drops into concentration. All other preoccupations disappear, leaving just happiness, an extreme happiness, cool and refreshed. I can stay there as long as I want."

Luang Pu smiled and said,

"It's good that you're getting results. Speaking of the happiness in concentration, it really is happy. There's nothing else that can compare. But if you get stuck just on that level, that's all you get. It doesn't give rise to the discernment of the noble path that can cut through becoming and birth, craving and attachment. So the next step is to let go of that happiness and contemplate the five aggregates to see them clearly."

82. A COMPARISON

“The mind of a noble one who has reached the transcendent, even though it may live in the world, surrounded by whatever the surroundings, can’t be pulled by the world into getting perturbed or mixed up with those things at all. In other words, the affairs of the world [gain, loss, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure, and pain] can’t overwhelm it, can’t pull it back to the level of a run-of-the-mill person’s mind. It can’t be brought under the power of defilement or craving ever again.

“It’s like coconut milk. Once you squeeze it out of the coconut flesh and boil it over high heat until the oil separates, you can’t turn it back into coconut milk again. No matter how much you may mix the oil with other coconut milk, you can’t turn the oil back into coconut milk at all.”

83. ANOTHER COMPARISON

“The paths, fruitions, and nibbāna are personal: You can truly see them only for yourself. Those who practice to that level will see them for themselves, will be clear about them for themselves, will totally end all their doubts about the Buddha’s teaching. If you haven’t reached that level, all you can do is keep on guessing. No matter how profoundly someone else may explain them to you, your knowledge about them will be guesswork. Whatever is guesswork will have to be uncertain.

“It’s like the turtle and the fish. The turtle lives in two worlds: the world on land and the world in the water. As for the fish, it lives only in one world, the water. If it were to get on land, it would die.

“One day, when a turtle came down into the water, it told a group of fish about how much fun it was to be on land: The lights and colors were pretty, and there were none of the difficulties that came from being in the water.

“The fish were intrigued, and wanted to see what it was like on land, so they asked the turtle, ‘Is it very deep on land?’

“The turtle answered, ‘What would be deep about it? It’s land.’

“The fish: ‘Are there lots of waves on land?’

“The turtle: ‘What would be wavy about it? It’s land.’

“The fish: ‘Is it murky with mud?’

“The turtle: ‘What would be murky about it? It’s land.’

“Notice the questions asked by the fish. They simply take their experience of water to ask the turtle, and the turtle can do nothing but say no.

“The mind of a run-of-the-mill person guessing about the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna is no different from the fish.”

84. THINGS OUTSIDE AND IN

The evening of April 2, 1981, after Luang Pu had returned from a ceremony in the palace and was resting at the royal monastic dwelling in Wat Bovorn, a high-ranking monk who was also a meditator came to visit and to converse with him about the Dhamma. His first question was this: “They say that a person who was a *yakkha* in a previous life, on returning to a human birth, can study magical formulae and be very powerful in whatever way he uses them. How true is that?”

Luang Pu sat right up and answered,

“I’ve never been interested in that sort of thing at all. But have you ever meditated to this point: xxxxxxxhasituppapāda,XXXXXX the movement of the mind where it smiles on its own, without any intention to smile? It happens only in a noble one’s mind. It doesn’t happen in ordinary people, because it lies beyond the conditions of fabrication—free in and of itself.”

85. NOT EVEN THE FIVE PRECEPTS

Great senior monks tend to have lots of students, both lay and ordained. And among those students are people both good and bad. Especially among the monks: There are lots of good ones, with a few bad ones mixed in. One of the monks close to Luang Pu tended to be a little too casual about taking things without permission. People would report this to Luang Pu, but he tended not to say anything about it.

Once, when he wanted something that this monk had taken, he asked another monk to go ask after it, but the first monk denied having taken it. The second monk came back to inform Luang Pu of the first monk's denial. Luang Pu didn't complain, but simply said this:

“Some monks are so intent on observing the 227 precepts that they forget to observe the five.”

86. NEVER PERTURBED

It was after 10 p.m., and I saw that Luang Pu was sitting and resting, so I went to inform him, “Luang Pu, Ajaan Khao has died.”

Instead of asking when or how, Luang Pu said,

“Ah, yes. Ajaan Khao is finally done with the burden of hauling his saṅkhāras around. I visited him four years ago and saw all the difficulties his physical saṅkhāras were giving him. He had to have other people looking after him all the time. As for me, I have no bad karma with regard to the body. But as for bad karma associated with the body, even noble ones—no matter what the level of their attainment—still have to contend with these things until they’re finally released from them and no longer involved with them. The normal state of the mind is that it has to live with things of this sort. But as for the mind that’s well-trained, when these things arise it can immediately let them go and maintain its peace, without worries, without attachments, free from the burden of having to be involved with them. That’s all there is.”

87. HOW THE DHAMMA PROTECTS

The great fire in Surin resulted in lot of suffering: a huge destruction of property and a great sense of loss. Some folks even went out of their minds. People came in a stream to see Luang Pu and to bemoan the good they had done in the past, saying, “We’ve been making merit at the temple and practicing the Dhamma since the time of our grandparents. Why didn’t that merit help us? Why didn’t the Dhamma protect us? The fire totally destroyed our homes.” Many of these people stopped coming to the monastery to make merit because the Dhamma didn’t help protect their homes from burning down.

Luang Pu said,

“The Dhamma doesn’t help people in that way at all. The fire simply acted in line with its function. What this means is that destruction, loss, disintegration, separation have always been with us in this world. As for those who practice the Dhamma, who have the Dhamma in their hearts, when they meet with these things they understand how to place the mind in such a way that it doesn’t suffer. That’s how the Dhamma helps. It’s not the case that it helps by preventing aging or death or hunger or fire. That’s not the case at all.”

88. ONLY PRACTICE CAN RESOLVE DOUBT

When people asked Luang Pu about death and rebirth, or about past and future lives, he was never interested in answering. Or if some people argued that they didn't believe that heaven or hell really existed, he never tried to reason with them or to cite evidence to defeat their arguments. Instead, he'd give them this piece of advice:

“People who practice the Dhamma don't have to give any thought to past or future lives, or to heaven or hell. All they have to do is be firm and intent on practicing correctly in line with the principles of virtue, concentration, and discernment. If there really are 16 levels of heaven as they say in the texts, people who practice well are sure to rise to those levels. Or if heaven and nibbāna don't exist, people who practice well don't lack for benefits here and now. They're sure to be happy, as human beings on a high level.

qqqqqq“Listening to what other people say, looking things up in the texts, can't resolve your doubts. You have to put effort into the practice to give rise to clear insight knowledge. That's when doubt will be totally resolved on its own.” QQQQQQ

89. IS THAT ALL THEY WANT?

Even though people would come in groups to hear Luang Pu's opinion about rebirth, claiming that this person or that was able to remember many past lives, seeing what they had been in the past or who their mothers or relatives in past lives had been, Luang Pu would say,

"I've never been interested in this sort of knowledge. Even just threshold concentration can give rise to it. Everything comes from the mind. Whatever you want to know or see, the mind will grant you the knowledge or vision—and quickly at that. If you're satisfied with just this level of knowledge, the good result is that you'll fear being reborn on a low level. That way you'll set your mind on doing good, being generous, observing the precepts, and not harming one another. You'll be able to smile, confident in the results of your merit.

"But as for eliminating defilement to destroy ignorance, craving, and attachment in order to reach total release from suffering, that's something else entirely."

90. NO FABLES

In all the long time I lived close to Luang Pu, there were never any fables or entertaining tales in his teachings—no Jātaka tales or stories of the present. All his teachings were noble truths, pure and simple, on the ultimate or impersonal level. Or else they were a few carefully chosen comments, as if he were trying to be frugal in his words. Even when he gave instructions on religious ceremonies or on how to make donations or basic morality, he taught in a very detached way. For the most part, he'd say,

“Ceremonies and merit-making activities can be regarded as skillful means, but from a meditator’s point of view they lead to only a small amount of skill, that’s all.”

91. STRANGE

After the opening ceremonies for the Phra Ajaan Mun Museum, Luang Pu traveled further to visit Ajaan Funn at Khaam Cave. In those days, large vehicles could go no further than the base of the hill where the cave was located, which meant that Luang Pu had to climb a long distance up the hill. This he found extremely tiring, having to stop and catch his breath many times. I felt keenly pained for my part in putting him to such difficulties. Finally, when we had reached the meeting hall at the top of the hill and Ajaan Funn had paid his respects, Ajaan Thate happened to arrive as well.

Seeing these three great elders coincidentally meeting and hearing them converse in a friendly way in such a peaceful and smiling atmosphere, my sense of inner pain totally disappeared and was replaced by a feeling of rapture.

Ajaan Funn expressed his admiration of Luang Pu, saying, "Your health is very strong. Even at your age, you're still able to climb all the way up the hill."

Luang Pu responded,

"I'm not really all that strong. I've looked the matter over and seen that I have no bad karma with regard to the body. When I can't use the body any more, I'll just drop it, that's all."

92. STRANGER STILL

I'm sure you can imagine how thrilled the large surrounding crowd of lay people was to be present at this coincidental meeting of three great ajaans. This sort of opportunity isn't easy to find. So two photographers from Surin starting taking as many pictures as they could.

When we were back on the bus for the trip home, the photographers saw that everyone was hungry for the pictures, so they announced that they would blow them up to 12" prints and sell them, with the proceeds going to help Jawm Phra Forest Monastery. I thought to myself that it wasn't a very pretty thing to see a price put on an ajaan's pictures with the purpose of selling them, but almost everyone on the bus placed an order.

When the photographers developed their film, they discovered that, of the more than twenty pictures they had gone to all that effort to take, all were totally blank, like a cloudless sky. That put an end to everyone's hopes for the pictures and, as it turned out, that was the last meeting among those three great ajaans.

93. THE TRUTH AS HE SAW IT

When people asked Luang Pu if he had read any of the many accounts of Ajaan Mun's life, he would answer, "A few." The next question would be, "And what do you think of all the psychic powers and miraculous events they describe?" Luang Pu would answer, "Back in the days when I was living with Ajaan Mun, I never heard him mention anything about them."

Normally, when Luang Pu would speak of Ajaan Mun, he'd speak only of his ascetic practices, saying,

"Among the later generations of monks, I've never seen a single one adhere to these practices as strictly as Ajaan Mun. He wore only robes made of rags that he had sewn and dyed himself. He never used finished robes received from anyone else. He stayed in forest dwellings his entire life. He ate only the food he had received on alms round, and only out of his alms bowl. Even when he was severely ill, he would sit up and hold his bowl in his lap for others to put alms in. He never took the special allowances that come from spending the Rains Retreat or receiving the kathina. He never got involved in construction work, and never tried to persuade other people to do so."

94. ANSWERING QUESTIONS WITH QUESTIONS

Because I had been on familiar terms with Luang Pu for a long time, when I would ask him a question he would tend to answer by asking a question in return—his way of getting me to think out the answer on my own.

For example, when I asked, “The minds of arahants are clean and bright. Can they predict the next lottery number accurately?”

He answered, “Would arahants be interested in knowing stuff like that?”

When I asked, “Do arahants dream in their sleep like ordinary people?”

He answered, “Aren’t dreams an affair of the aggregate of fabrication?”

When I asked, “Have there ever been any run-of-the-mill people still thick with defilements who have nevertheless been able to teach other people to become arahants?”

He answered,

“Haven’t there been a lot of doctors who, even though they themselves are ill, have been able to cure other people of their illnesses?”

95. LUANG PU'S HABITS

Bodily: He was physically strong and nimble, well-proportioned in his features, clean-smelling, with few diseases. He liked to bathe with warm water only once a day.

Verbal: He had a deep voice, but spoke softly. He was a man of few words who spoke the truth, spoke directly, with no scheming to his speech. In other words, he never hinted, never cajoled, never spoke sarcastically, never gossiped, never begged, never asked anyone's pardon, never talked about his dreams. He never told Jātaka stories or fabulous tales.

Mental: There was a truth to him—once he had set his mind on doing something, he would work at it until he succeeded. He was always kind and compassionate, quiet, calm, and enduring. He never flared up in anger or showed any signs of frustration or impatience. He was never upset about things that were lost, and was never heedless. Fully mindful, alert, he was cheerful at all times. He never seemed to suffer, and was always unshaken by events. No untoward states of mind overcame him.

He always taught us,

“Try to clearly understand events as events: that they arise, change, and then dissolve away. Don't suffer or be sad because of them.”

96. HEAVY PAIN, BUT NOT HEAVY WITH PAIN

Luang Pu was severely ill at the Chulalongkorn Hospital. On the night of the 17th day of his stay, he was very fatigued, to the point where the doctors had to give him an oxygen tube. Late that night, after midnight, a famous monk together with a large following came to pay respect. Seeing that this was a special occasion, I let them into Luang Pu's room. Luang Pu lay on his right side with his eyes closed throughout the visit. When the monk and his following had bowed down to him, the monk leaned over him and spoke directly into his ear, "Luang Pu, do you still have feelings of pain?"

Luang Pu answered,

"Feeling and body still exist in line with their nature, but I don't partake of that feeling at all."

97. A SAFE SHORTCUT

On January 20, 1973, just before Luang Pu was to leave Chulalongkorn Hospital, his students decided to donate a saṅghadāna to dedicate the merit to the past generations who had built the hospital and had since passed on.

When the ceremony was over, a number of doctors and nurses came to pay their respects to Luang Pu and to express their happiness that he had recovered. They commented in a friendly way, “Your health is still good and strong. Your face is bright, as if you hadn’t been sick at all. This is probably the fruit of your good powers of concentration. We don’t have much spare time to practice concentration. Are there any methods that are simple or quick?”

Luang Pu responded,

“Whenever you have time, use that time to practice. Training the mind, examining the mind, is the quickest, most direct method of all.”

98. EVERYTHING COMES FROM ACTION

Throughout his life, Luang Pu never accepted the idea of lucky hours or lucky days. Even when he was simply asked, “What would be a good day to ordain?” or “to disrobe?” or “Which days are lucky or unlucky?” he never went along with the idea. He’d usually say, “All days are good.” If people asked him to determine an auspicious time, he would have them go find out for themselves, or else he would say, “Any time that’s convenient is a good time.”

He would conclude by saying,

“Everything comes from our behavior. Good times, bad times, lucky times, unlucky times, merit, sin: All these things come from human behavior.”

99. MAKING NO SHOW

Luang Pu never did anything to make a show or call attention to himself. For example, if people wanted to take his picture, their timing would have to be right. For instance, if he had already put on his full set of robes to listen to the Pāṭimokkha or to ordain a monk or to participate in one sort of ceremony or another, then if you asked to take his picture at a moment like that, it would be easy. But if he was sitting informally and you asked him to get up and put on his robes to pose for a picture, you'd have a hard time getting him to comply.

Once, a lady from Bangkok brought a fine blanket for Luang Pu to use in the cold season. A few months later, in the middle of the hot season, she happened to come and pay her respects again. She asked him to get the blanket and pose with it so that she could take a picture, because she had forgotten to take a picture when she had donated it. Luang Pu refused to do so, saying gently, "There's no real need for that." Even when she asked him a second time, and a third, he kept saying, "There's no real need."

When she left I felt ill at ease, so I went to Luang Pu and asked him, "Do you realize how dissatisfied she was?"

Luang Pu smiled and said,

"I know. And the reason she was dissatisfied is because she has a dissatisfying heart."

100. THE END OF REBIRTH

Once a senior meditation teacher came to discuss many high-level topics of Dhamma with Luang Pu and ended with a question: “Some of the senior meditation monks conduct themselves well and inspire great respect. Even other monks agree that they’re firmly established in the Buddha’s teachings. But then something happens. Either they disrobe, or their behavior starts going astray, running afoul of the Dhamma and Vinaya. So what level of Dhamma does one have to reach in order to cut transmigration for sure, so that there’s no more becoming and birth?”

Luang Pu said,

“Being strictly restrained in line with the Vinaya and observing the ascetic practices is an admirable form of conduct that’s extremely inspiring. But if you haven’t developed the mind to the level of heightened mind and heightened discernment, it can always regress, for it hasn’t yet reached the transcendent. Actually, arahants don’t need to know much. They simply have to develop their minds to be clear about the five aggregates and to penetrate dependent co-arising (paṭicca samuppāda). That’s when they can stop fabricating, stop searching, stop all motions of the mind. Right there is where everything ends. All that remains is pure, clean, bright—great emptiness, enormously empty.”

101. A COMPARISON

“The desire to know and see so as to put an end to one’s doubts is something you find in all advanced people. Every science, every branch of learning, has been established so that people will question and want to know. That’s when they’ll make the effort to study and practice to reach the goal of that branch of learning.

“But in the area of the Buddha’s teachings, you have to study and practice in a balanced way. And your effort has to be intense so that you can enter into the highest thing in the Dhamma on your own. That’s when you’ll end your doubts totally on your own.

“It’s like a person from the countryside who’s never seen Bangkok. When people tell him that, in addition to being developed in other ways, Bangkok has a ‘Jewel Wall’ [the name of the fortress wall around the Grand Palace] and an enormous ‘Gold Mountain’ [the name of the cetiya at Wat Sraket], he makes up his mind to go to Bangkok with the expectation that he’ll be able to get some jewels from the wall and some gold from the mountain. But when he finally makes it to Bangkok and someone shows him, ‘That’s the Jewel Wall; that’s the Gold Mountain,’ that puts an immediate end to all his questions and expectations.

“The paths, fruitions, and nibbāna are like that.”

102. THE SAFEST WAY TO DWELL

I remember that in 1976 two meditation teachers from the northern part of the Northeast came to pay their respects to Luang Pu. The way they discussed the practice with him was very delightful and inspiring. They described the virtues and attainments of the different ajaans with whom they had lived and practiced for a long time, saying that that luang pu had concentration as his constant mental dwelling; this ajaan dwelled in the Brahma attitudes, which is why so many people respected him; that luang pu dwelled in the limitless Brahma attitudes, which is why there was no limit to the number of students he had, and why he was always safe from dangers.

Luang Pu said,

“Whatever level a monk has reached, as far as I’m concerned he’s welcome to dwell there. As for me, I dwell with knowing.”

103. CONTINUED

When those two monks heard Luang Pu say that he dwelled with knowing, they were silent for a moment and then asked him to explain what dwelling with knowing was like.

Luang Pu explained,

“Knowing is the normalcy of mind that’s empty, bright, pure, that has stopped fabricating, stopped searching, stopped all mental motions—having nothing, not attached to anything at all.”

104. THE END OF STRESS

Luang Pu was pure in his speech because he liked to talk about the genuine truth. He'd speak only of the highest aims of the Buddha's teachings, he'd refer only to the Buddha's words that led solely to the end of suffering and stress. You could tell this from the Buddha's teaching he quoted most often.

The Buddha said,

“Monks, there that dimension where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither the dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished, unevolving, without support. This, just this, is the end of stress.”

105. HIS LAST ILLNESS

When Luang Pu returned from the hospital in early 1983, it didn't mean that he had fully recovered from his illness, simply that he had to use an extreme level of endurance to survive for eight more months, to the special merit-making celebration that had been planned for his 96th birthday. As the day of the ceremony approached, his symptoms started getting erratic: He'd be very tired, uncomfortable, and feverish from time to time. I asked him if we should take him back to Chulalongkorn Hospital, but he said, "There's no need to." And then he added, "I forbid you to take me, for even if I went, I wouldn't recover."

I replied, "Last time your illness was heavier than this and you still recovered. This time it's not heavy at all. You're sure to recover."

Luang Pu said,

"That was last time. This isn't last time."

106. APPROACHING DEATH

On October 29, 1983, Luang Pu's condition was no better than stable after 1:00 p.m., but his complexion was abnormally bright. His followers—lay people, town monks, and forest monks—came in large numbers for the celebration.

At 3:00 p.m., a large contingent of forest monks came to pay respect to Luang Pu, who sat up and discussed the Dhamma with them. Speaking in a clear voice, he advised them on the entire path of practice as if he were resolving all their doubts and questions, summarizing all the meditation instructions he had ever taught.

Later that night, near 10:00 p.m., Luang Pu had us take him out of his hut in a wheelchair. He looked gently around the whole area of the monastery, with no one realizing that that would be his last look at things outside.

107. ONE LAST RECOLLECTION OF THE DHAMMA

After 10:00 p.m., Luang Pu had us take him back into his room. He lay on his back, supported by a large pillow. He asked the eight or nine monks in the room to chant the Seven Blessing Chants for him to hear. Then he told them to chant the *Sati-sambojjhāṅga Sutta* three times, and Dependent Co-arising three times. Then he asked us to chant the Great Establishings of Mindfulness (*Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna*) Discourse, but none of us had memorized it. So he said, “Open your chanting books and chant from the book,” but there were no chanting books around. Fortunately, Ajaan Phuunsak, who had been looking after Luang Pu all along, had brought his copy of the Royal Chanting Book, so he picked it up and searched through the book to find the right page, leafing back and forth until Luang Pu said, “Hand it here.” He then opened the book to the right page without even looking at it and said, “Chant from right here.” This amazed every monk in the room, for Luang Pu had opened the book right to the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna* Discourse, on page 172. The discourse was long, and it took us more than two hours to finish it. He listened quietly throughout.

108. FINAL WORDS

A few moments after we had finished chanting the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna* Discourse, Luang Pu began speaking about the Lord Buddha's total nibbāna, from the beginning to the end. Here, I'll ask just to quote his concluding remarks:

“The Lord Buddha didn't attain nibbāna in any of his jhānic attainments. When he left the fourth jhāna, his mental aggregates all ceased at once, with nothing remaining. In other words, he allowed his feeling aggregate to cease in an awake state of mind, the normal human mental series, complete with mindfulness and alertness, with no other mental states coming to blind or delude the mind at all. This was the mind fully in its own state. You could call that state great emptiness, or the original cosmos, or nibbāna, whichever you like. That's the state I've been practicing all along to reach.”

Those were Luang Pu's last words.

109. A MOMENT OF WILDERNESS IN THE CITY

Let's go back in time for a moment to some events nearly 100 years ago. Luang Pu's group of four wandering monks and novices had split off from Ajaan Mun's group and were wandering through Thaa Khantho district in Kalasin province. As they went through the dense forest, they encountered all sorts of dangers and difficulties: every kind of wild animal and, in particular, malaria. Finally, one of the monks, unable to fight off the disease, died in a pitiful way right in front of his fellow monks. Worse than that, when Luang Pu split off from the group accompanied by just one small novice into another forest wilderness near Kut Kawm village, malaria came and took the life of the novice right before his eyes. Luang Pu could do nothing but look on in utter dismay, simply because he lacked the medicine to treat the disease.

Now come back to the events just after 4:00 a.m. on October 30, 1983. That same condition of wilderness returned for a moment in Luang Pu's room, for although he was seriously ill there wasn't a single nurse, not a single drop of saline solution anywhere around. There were simply Luang Pu's monastic students circled around him, as if protecting his total freedom to put down his body in a death that left no traces—completely pure, quiet, and calm.

110. EVEN THE TIMING WAS APT

The Buddha had searched for the truth for six years, and when he gained Awakening, he did so at the approach of dawn, i.e., after 4:00 a.m. Having gained Awakening, he taught for another 45 years, using the period after 4:00 a.m. each day to spread his awareness to see whom he should teach the next day. When the time came for his total nibbāna, he chose the same time of day.

A bundle of fabrications that had arisen on October 4, 1888 in Praasaat Village, Surin province, grew and developed in stages, conducting his life in a way that was admirable and right. He remained in the ochre robe to the end of his days, practicing in an exemplary fashion, truly an “unexcelled field of merit for the world.” He worked in a consummate way for his own true benefit and for the true benefit of others until October 30, 1983. That’s when Luang Pu dropped his body at 4:13 a.m.—just like that.

What was amazing was that his students—lay and ordained, city dwellers and forest dwellers—had already gathered to make merit in celebration of the beginning of Luang Pu’s 96th year, the completion of his eighth twelve-year cycle, as if in full preparation for this event.

111. NO BAD KARMA WITH REGARD TO THE BODY

It was only then that I understood what Luang Pu had meant when he said that he had no bad karma with regard to the body.

For even though he had reached his 96th year, his body was strong, spry, clean, and calm. Always fully mindful and alert, he suffered no senility or forgetful lapses at all.

When the time came for him to die, he died quietly with no signs of pain or difficulty. He caused no trouble, mental or physical, for those who were looking after him: no waste of doctors, no waste of medicine, no waste of anyone's time.

In the midst of the stillness near dawn, free of the noise of people or traffic—even the leaves of the trees were still, the air was cool, with a gentle drizzle falling like snow—Luang Pu, a member of the pure, noble Saṅgha, dropped his body, leaving us with only his virtues to remember and miss in a way that will know no end.

GLOSSARY

Ajaan (Pali: ācariya): Teacher; mentor.

Appanā samādhi: Fixed penetration, the strongest level of concentration.

Arahant (Pali: arahant): Worthy; pure. An epithet for the Buddha.

Brahmā: Literally, a “great one.” A deva inhabiting one of the highest celestial realms. The Brahma attitudes are four qualities of mind that enable one to become a brahmā after death: goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.

Buddho: Awake; enlightened. An epithet for the Buddha.

Deva: Literally, a “shining one.” A terrestrial spirit or an inhabitant of one of the many heavens.

Dhamma (dharma): Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles underlying their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, “Dhamma” is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of *nibbāna*, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

Dhutaṅga: Ascetic practice. Optional observances that monks may undertake to cut away mental defilement and attachment to the requisites of life. There are thirteen altogether, and they include the practice of wearing robes made from thrown-away cloth, the practice of using only one set of three robes, the practice of going for alms, the practice of not by-passing any donors on one's alms path, the practice of eating no more than one meal a day, the practice of eating from one's alms bowl, the practice of not accepting food after one has eaten one's fill, the practice of living in the wilderness, the practice of living at the foot of a tree, the practice of living under the open sky, the practice of living in a cemetery, the practice of living in whatever place is assigned to one, and the practice of not lying down.

Jātaka: A story, often mythical, of one of the Buddha's previous lives.

Jhāna: Meditative absorption in a single object, notion or sensation.

Kamma (karma): Intentional act resulting in states of being and birth.

Khandha: Heap; group; aggregate. Physical and mental components of the personality and of sensory experience in general, out of which one's sense of self is fabricated. Altogether there are five: form—physical phenomena; feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain; perception—mental labels and concepts; fabrications—thought-constructs; and consciousness of the six senses.

Luang Phaw: Venerable father. A term of respect for an older monk.

Luang Pu: Venerable paternal grandfather. A term of great respect for an elder monk.

Luang Taa: Venerable maternal grandfather. A term connoting more affection than respected, usually—but not always—used for monks ordained late in life.

Magga: Path. Specifically, the path to the cessation of suffering and stress. The four transcendent paths—or rather, one path with four levels of refinement—are the path to stream entry (entering the stream to *nibbāna*, which ensures that one will be reborn at most only seven more times), the path to once-returning, the path to non-returning, and the path to arahantship.

Nibbāna (nirvāṇa): Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from greed, anger, and delusion, from physical sensations and mental acts. As the term is used to refer also to the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire exists in a latent state to a greater or lesser degree in all objects. When activated, it seizes and sticks to its fuel. As long as it remains latent or is extinguished, it is "unbound.")

Paṭicca-samuppāda: Dependent co-arising, an analysis of the mental and physical factors that combine to produce suffering.

Pāṭimokkha: The code of the monks' 227 basic precepts, chanted fortnightly.

Phala: Fruition. Specifically, the fruition of any of the four transcendent paths (see *magga*).

Phra: Venerable. The common title for a monk.

Sambojjhaṅga: Factor for awakening. There are seven in all: mindfulness, analysis of mental qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, and equanimity.

Saṅgha: The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, this refers to the Buddhist monkhood. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the transcendent paths (see *magga*) culminating in *nibbāna*.

Saṅghadāna: A donation dedicated to the entire community of monks, rather than to a specific individual.

Sati: Mindfulness.

Sutta (sūtra): Discourse.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline. The Buddha's term for his teaching was, "this Dhamma-Vinaya."

Vipassanā: Insight.

Wat: Monastery; temple.

Yakkha: A fierce spirit, usually associated with trees, mountains, or caves.

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