

## *Remembering Luang Lung*

*March 23, 2020*

Tonight marks the tenth anniversary of the passing away of the monk that Ajaan Fuang's students called Luang Lung, which means Venerable Uncle. Ajaan Fuang was Than Paw, Venerable Father. Luang Lung was the monk who arranged for Ajaan Fuang to teach in Bangkok. Even though Luang Lung spent most of his life as a monk in Bangkok, he had met Ajaan Lee when he was very young. He was a young novice out in the provinces, and he was very impressed. When Ajaan Lee was building Wat Asokaram near Bangkok, Luang Lung would get a group of his friends—who at that time were studying at a monastery on the Thonburi side of Bangkok—and they would take the streetcar out, walk out to Wat Asokaram, help out on the weekends with the work, all the work that monks couldn't do but that novices could do—digging holes, planting trees, cutting things: That's what Luang Lung and his friends would do. Then, on Sunday evening, they would head back. One time they got to the streetcar station too late: The last streetcar had left, so they walked all the way back, arriving at their next monastery the next dawn.

When Luang Lung moved to Wat Makut, he suggested that the abbot go listen to Ajaan Lee, who was giving Dhamma talks at the time at another monastery in Bangkok. The abbot was very impressed. The abbot eventually became Supreme Patriarch, and it was at Luang Lung's instigation that he invited Ajaan Fuang to teach at Wat Makut. Luang Lung looked after Ajaan Fuang while he was in Bangkok all the way until Ajaan Fuang's death.

He was helpful in many ways. Two things stand out in his personality. One was that he was *extremely* generous. He had the position of being Wat Makut's bhattuddesaka, which is the monk who looks after all the invitations, arranging which monk goes to which invitation. And being a bhattuddesaka at one of the main funeral monasteries in Bangkok put him in a position where he could have made a lot of money.

In fact, there was a case one time when the bhattuddesaka at another funeral monasteries became involved in a scandal. He had arranged for all the aspects of the funeral business in the monastery—providing the food, providing the flowers—to be taken over by his relatives. So a newspaper in Bangkok decided to do a survey. It checked the bank accounts of all the bhattuddesakas at the funeral monasteries in Bangkok, and its report was that Luang Lung was the poorest of the lot. That's partly because his policy was never to go to an invitation unless the people specified that he go, and partly because he was extremely generous with

what he did receive. If anyone's relative died and Luang Lung found out about it, he would be helpful, giving them robes and other things they would need for the funeral.

When we were building the chedi at Wat Dhammasathit, he had a vision in his meditation of a lottery number. So he arranged for one of his supporters to buy the lottery number, and sure enough, it won. And so half the money he gave to the building of the chedi: a considerable sum. Sometimes he would come out on the weekends to help with the work. One night, around midnight, he noticed that the lay people were getting hungry. So he went down to the kitchen to see if the woman in charge of the kitchen had made any rice porridge for them. It turned out that she'd gone to bed and hadn't done anything. So Luang Lung fixed a pot of rice porridge, then walked back up to the hill, and said to somebody, "There's a pot of rice porridge down at the kitchen. Go fetch it." He didn't say, of course, that he had fixed it, because the lay people probably wouldn't have dared eat it. But that was typical of him: He would be generous but not in a way that was showing off. There's a phrase in Thai, "sticking gold leaf on the back of the Buddha image"—in other words, doing good but not doing it in a way where anyone knows. And that was very typical of him.

He also liked to hand out amulets. He always seemed to have valuable amulets of one sort or another. He had his own collection, but he handed out an awful lot. Someone once had said to him, "You've probably got a lot of good karma from your past lifetimes with amulets, which is why so many good amulets come to you." And he said, "No, it's not past lifetimes. It's this lifetime."

As for that money he gained from the lottery, the other half he spent on a trip around the world. As a young novice, he'd read lots of books—books about geography, books about history, books about all kinds of things—and he was curious to see the places he'd read about. As a novice also, he had gone around and visited all the ajaans in Thailand and Laos: forest ajaans and what they call the keci ajaans. Keci ajaans were the ones who practiced magical charms. These tended to be monks who were very taciturn, but Luang Lung was very curious about them. He wanted to know their stories and he wasn't afraid of them. Many of them had had reputations for being very strict, very harsh, but he didn't let that deter him. He wanted to ask questions. He wanted to know.

One of the purposes of remembering the good qualities of people who've passed away is to think about what good qualities they had that we don't have that we could adopt from them. And this quality of being inquisitive, of wanting to find out what was going on: That's a good one to imitate. We hear about things, we read about things, but we don't really know until we've seen for ourselves—and

we can't expect that knowledge is going to be handed to us on a platter. We have to dig for it. Sometimes Luang Lung was rebuffed by people when he asked questions, but he kept looking, trying to find out. And he kept reading all the way through his life.

And it's good to think about his generosity. He belonged to a generation that wasn't wealthy—they had had to live through a war—so he focused on what he *did* have to be generous with: He had his energy; he had his strength. He was very slight of build but he had a lot of energy of will, so he was generous with that.

I owe him a lot. He was the monk who shaved my head when I ordained, but I owe him much more than that. After Ajaan Fuang passed away, he looked after me, made sure that the senior monks in Bangkok didn't rope me in when they discovered that I existed. And when he got something good, he was always willing to share.

There's one story of his that I really like. He was once given a gold Buddha image, solid gold, about three or four inches tall. He said to himself, "This is not appropriate for me to keep. It's something that should belong to the king." He decided that one day, if he ever happened to encounter the king, he would give it to him. So he kept it in his shoulder bag, wrapped it up in tissue paper so that it would look like something of no value. And sure enough, there was one time when he was up in the north, visiting one of the royal projects with a couple of lay people, and the king happened to fly in in his helicopter. So Luang Lung told the lay people to go away, and he went and sat alone under a tree. The king got out of the helicopter, saw Luang Lung, came over, and bowed down. Luang Lung slipped him the gold Buddha image. The king unwrapped it and said, "Ah, this is gold." And Luang Lung said, "I know." The royal attendants were standing by with their hands out, ready to receive the image from the king. The king looked at them and put the image in his pocket, bowed down again, and left.

That's a good quality to have: You get something good and your immediate reaction is, "Who can I give this to?" As Ajaan Lee says, this is what makes it really yours: when you give it away.

So it's good to think about the generosity of people in the past and about how we can continue that principle of generosity now. We're living in a difficult time. A lot of people are under a lot of strain with the curfews, with the isolation, with the fear of the disease. And one way of being easy on ourselves and easy on others is to be as generous as we can with our time, with our energy, realizing that we're keeping alive a good tradition, a tradition that goes back through our teachers all the way to the Buddha himself.