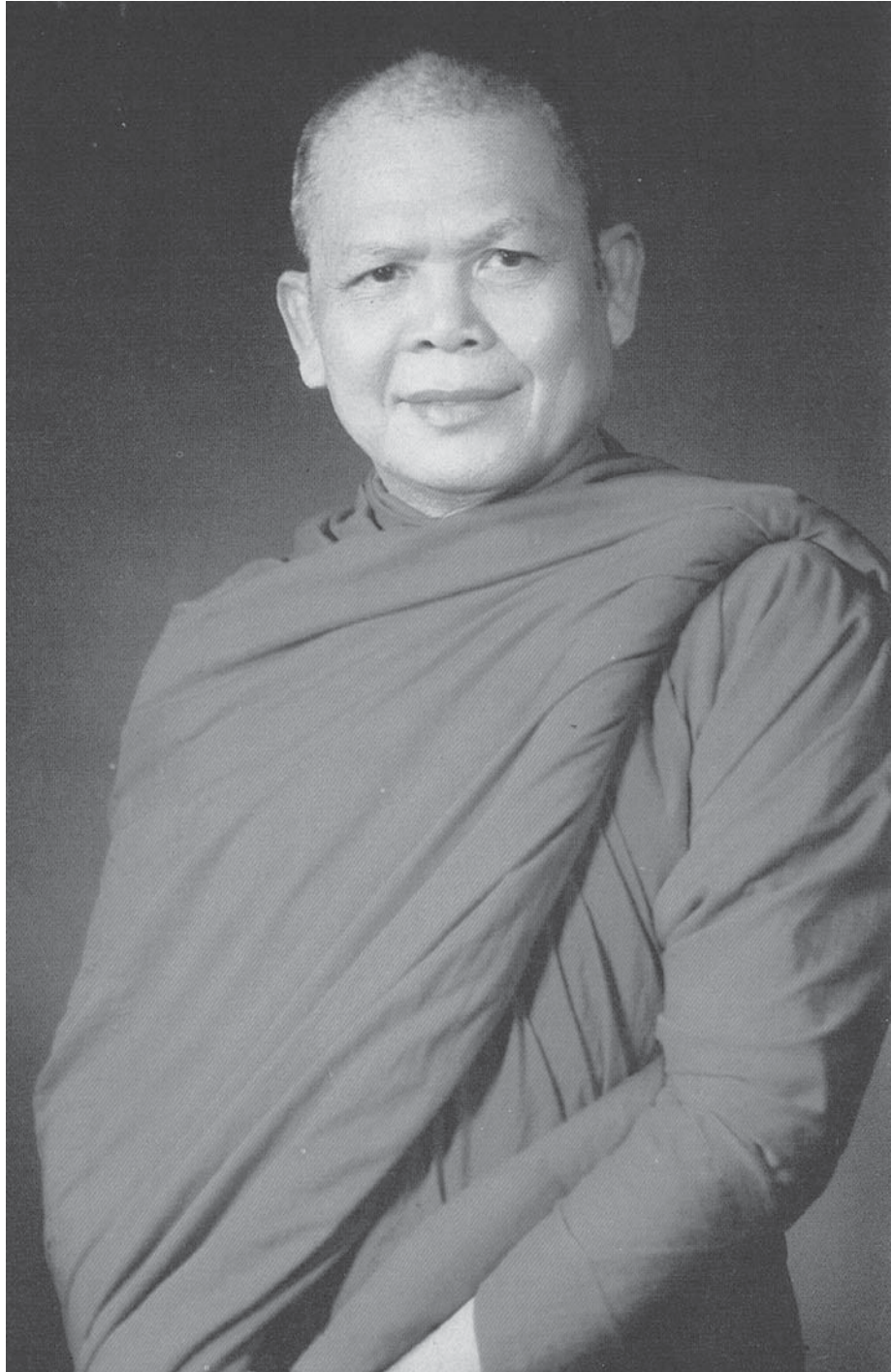




The Life Story of  
**Luang Ta Chi**



# The Life Story of **Luang Ta Chi**



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## Preface

In my translation of Luang Ta Chi's life story I have followed the romanization system of the Royal Institute. One exception is the term *ajan* (teacher). Instead of *achan*, the Royal Institute's spelling, I write *ajan*, because it reflects both local pronunciation and English usage more accurately. The monastic names of Thai monks are spelled phonetically, unless the monk has his own preferred English spelling, such as "Buddhadasa" instead of "Phutthathat." The first time a Pali or Thai term is mentioned it is in italic, after that it is in plain type.

In addition to Ajan (teacher), Thai Buddhists, young monks, and novices generally call elder monks Luang Pho (venerable father) or Luang Pu (venerable grandfather) or Luang Ta (venerable grandfather).

In translating the interviews with Luang Ta Chi I have attempted to capture the essence of his ideas in English, as well as the lively tone and the color of his talks. In quoting portions of the interviews, I have left out repetitions and switched sentences within paragraphs for a natural flow in English. When possible I have tried to translate his recollections literally. In addition, I have attempted to put the stories of his life into their historical context. I hope that Luang Ta Chi's life story will be accessible to students who are interested in Thai Buddhism and in the history of Thailand. Due to time constraints, I end Luang Ta Chi's life story when he became abbot of Wat Thai Washington, D.C.



In Luang Ta Chi's youth the country called Siam was renamed "Thailand" in 1941 during the Phibun regime. The words "Thailand" and "Thai" are used in the post-1941 context. As a result of the nationalist policy of the Phibun government, "Thai" came to encompass all ethnic groups in Thailand, not just the Siamese.

The source notes provided at the end of the life story appear in sequential order. The books listed in the sources are not meant to be exhaustive of the subjects; I list only those from which I draw material in the creation of this life story.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor David K. Wyatt for providing the maps and scanning all the illustrations for this book. I thank Dolina Millar for her help in rendering several catchy titles of Luang Ta Chi's short stories into English. I am grateful to Patricia Connor for her copyediting skills and to Dr. John LeRoy for his copyediting and computer expertise. Despite short notice, they have cheerfully helped me meet the publication deadline for Luang Ta Chi's life story.

**Dr. Kamala Tiyanich**  
**Ithaca, New York**





Map of Thailand showing provinces





## The Life Story of **Luang Ta Chi**

Luang Ta Chi is the pen name of Phra Maha Surasak Dhammarat, abbot of Wat Thai Washington, D.C. A wat is a place of residence for monastics and a temple of worship. It is also a community center for monastics and laypeople. Luang Ta means Venerable Grandfather. Chi (pronounced Chee) is the first syllable of his monastic name, Chiwanantho. Adults as well as children began calling him Luang Ta Chi affectionately after he began using the pen name in his writings. He will be referred to by his original name, Maha Surasak, when the story of his youth in Thailand is being told. His most familiar name, Luang Ta Chi, will be used whenever he is speaking in his own voice.

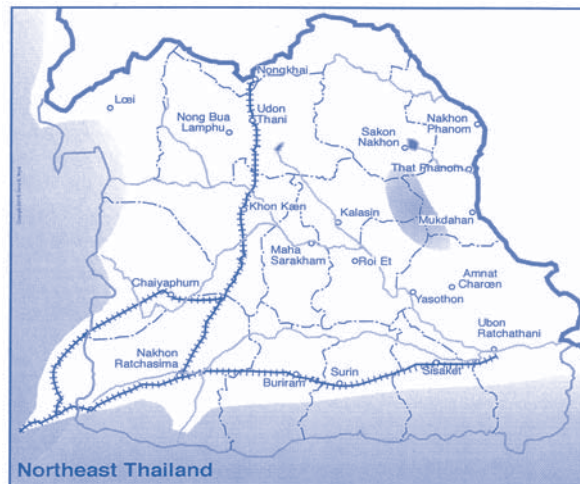
The following story is an adventure in education, pursued not always under the best of conditions.





## Village of the Beautiful Termite Hill

Luang Ta Chi was born on Tuesday, June 8, 1925, in the year 2467 of the Buddhist era, the year of the ox. As a child he was called Sak, a nickname formed by shortening his real name, Surasak. His father's name was Chan; his mother's, Mun. Like most villagers, his parents were farmers. They had nine children; Sak was the fourth. The family lived in a Lao village called Ban Phon Ngam, or Village of the Beautiful Termite Hill. At the time of Sak's birth, his natal village was part of Mukdahan district in Nakhon Phanom, a province on the Mekong river. The people of Nakhon Phanom were mostly Lao, but a variety of other ethnic groups made their home in the province as well.



*The Map of Northeast Thailand*





*Village house with spirit shrine in the foreground.*

Sak was born near the end of the reign of King Rama VI. The king died in November 1925, about six months after Sak's birth. During the absolute monarchy, Rama VI, who was educated in England for several years, adopted many Western customs. He popularized the phrase "Nation, Religion, and King" in order to inculcate devotion to the nation and to state Buddhism. The king proclaimed that his subjects were to attach surnames to their personal names. Until this time, local people were known only by their given names, and they usually responded to nicknames given in infancy. Near the time Sak was born, King Rama VI, who reigned from 1910 to 1925, decreed that education be made

compulsory throughout the land. Consequently, all children between the ages of seven and fourteen were required to attend an elementary school run by the state, which offered a curriculum based on Western models.



*A village in Khamcha-ee district*

Sak spent his entire childhood in what the Thai environmentalists called the jungle-village era, a period that reaches far, far back in time until its end in 1957. During this long period of time, Siam, as the country was then called,

was sparsely populated, overwhelmingly rural, and blessed with what appeared to be unlimited resources. When Sak was a young boy, forested land was still abundant. In 1937 forests covered 60 percent, or about ten million hectares (forty thousand square miles), of the northeastern region. Such extensive forest cover meant that traveling between villages, usually by oxcart, on horseback, or on foot was slow and difficult. The villages of Mukdahan and the subdistrict of Khamcha-ee were isolated. Luang Ta Chi spread his arms wide to convey something of the size of the huge trees he saw in his younger days. “I saw all kinds of trees in the forests of Khamcha-ee, such as ironwood, *mai phan chat*, Indian oak, *pradu*, and *jamba* trees. There were many streams and plenty of fish. The stream near my village was especially deep, and bamboo trees grew thickly along its banks. These bamboos prevented the banks from collapsing. We could live off the forest.” The four basic necessities - food, clothing, medicine, and shelter - could be obtained from the environment for no money.



## **The Pleasure of Tending Water Buffaloes**



In rural villages children played an important part in the economic life of the family. They contributed significantly to the welfare of the household. A child knew that she or he was useful, that the family could not function as well without the child's labor. Young children usually began the day with chores such as cooking, pounding rice, fetching water, and taking care of younger brothers and sisters. Boys had to work in the fields; they got their hands dirty. The thought of asking for money in return for their work never entered the children's minds.





*The area below the house is used  
for keeping animals, for weaving, for resting,  
and for socializing.*

Water buffaloes were the most important domestic animals for local farmers, who used them to plow their paddy fields. In the morning, village boys rounded up the water buffaloes and took them out to graze. At night the buffaloes were brought back to the village and shut in their pens. Most abbots of town and village monasteries all over Thailand learned how to tend water buffaloes when they were young boys. Ajan Panya, an elder preacher who had a strong influence upon Luang Ta Chi, began tending water buffaloes when he was six years old.

Ajan Panyananta is abbot of Wat Chola Prathan in Nonthaburi. People call him Ajan Panya or Venerable Father Panya. He was born in 1911 in Phattalung, the southernmost province of Siam. His parents called him Pan. When he was

six years old, Pan was given the task of taking two water buffaloes out to graze each day before the sun came up. Such a chore could be daunting to children who believed in ghosts, but they could not say no.

Ajan Panya recalls how he faced his fear of ghosts. “The most unsettling thing was to have to get up very early during the plowing season. The buffaloes had to be in the paddy field before sunrise. I was afraid of ghosts but dared not tell my father for fear of being scolded. I didn’t like it when my parents told me to do a task at night when it was pitch-black. Before dawn I had to take the buffaloes out to eat grass to get them ready for the work of plowing. I was afraid of walking in the dark, so I hung on to one of the buffaloes. Wherever he went to eat grass, I went with him and watched him graze. I talked to him as I would to a human companion. I thought if anything happened, I could always climb on his back and make him run. But nothing ever happened. Sometimes I saw a stump. In the darkness it looked like somebody was standing there. I hung on tightly to my buffalo while eyeing the thing carefully. The mystery finally unfolded when the sun came up. It was just a stump. Not a ghost as I had feared.”

Young boys given the responsibility of caring for buffaloes became sensitive to the animals’ well-being. These great animals were the children’s friends. Ajan Panya recalled, “The buffalos’ happiness was my happiness. I could tell at a glance if they had had enough to eat. Watching the buffaloes submerge in a water hole gave me joy. On days when the buffaloes did not get enough to eat, I felt terrible. My heart sank.”

Taking care of buffaloes could be pleasant, especially if the boys were working together in a group. The task gave







*Buffalo cart*

the youngsters the opportunity both to be away from the watchful eyes of adults and to expend their youthful energy outdoors in the fields and forests. As a young boy, Luang Ta Chi spent a lot of time tending water buffaloes. The abbot remembers the performance of this task as among his happiest childhood experiences. He recalled how the village boys learned about their immediate environment. “Ban Phon Ngam is not very far from Phu Phakwan (Sweet Vegetable Hill). We usually got up early in the morning and rode the water buffaloes to the hill. There were zigzag trails going up the mountain along which we guided the buffaloes until we reached the top. The slopes were covered with all kinds of big trees, but the hilltop itself was a flat meadow. Once we got the buffaloes to the top to graze in the meadow, we were free to do whatever we liked. We hung out all day playing with each other, running around, climbing trees, picking mushrooms, looking at birds and other animals, and so on. In the late afternoon we rounded up the buffaloes and rode them back to our village.”



## The Education of Novice Sak



*Children in a village in Khamcha-ee.*

Sak did not begin his formal schooling until he was twelve years old. This was not unusual for rural youth of his generation or earlier generations. With the exception of Buddhist training in the local wat, during Sak's childhood there was no formal process called education. Learning was the product of the children's relationship with their rural community and their natural environment. Sak and other children learned from their grandparents, their parents, their elder brothers and sisters, or their older friends. Old farmers in Ban Phon Ngam, women as well as men, were knowledgeable about their local environment. Working alongside the elders, the village youth learned how to plow and harrow the paddy fields in which the rice seedlings were

transplanted. They learned how to build simple houses and construct ox carts, yokes, and plows. They learned to build boats, make brooms and rakes, produce glue from animal parts, and fashion musical instruments. After the harvest season ended, village boys learned to thatch roofs, weave baskets, mats, and nets, and make fishing traps. Village girls learned to raise silkworms, make dyes from plants in the forest, and weave cloth for the simple clothing used by members of their families. To boys and girls of the village, learning was location-specific and nurtured an intimate relationship with the living world around them.



*Village street*

Although the law making primary education compulsory had been passed before Sak was born, no state school was created in his natal village until 1937. By then Sak was twelve years old. Thus, Sak and other boys of his age were the first children from the Village of the Beautiful Termite Hill to attend state school and to learn the central Thai language.

“We did not have any textbooks,” Luang Ta Chi recalls. “The schoolteachers wrote on the blackboards, and the children copied everything down.” Sak was a very good student. He was diligent and never missed classes. He earned top scores in the examinations at the end of first grade. In 1939 Sak finished second grade, again ranking first in his class. By this time he was fourteen years old. According to the rules, fourteen-year-olds were not allowed to remain in primary school. Although he loved to study, Sak had to quit.



*Schoolchildren in Khamcha-ee district.*

A few months later, on May 3, 1939, the anniversary of the Buddha's attaining enlightenment, Sak ordained as a novice (*samanera*) at Wat Pho Sai, the village monastery. Phra Ajan Hong Sitharo was the preceptor who performed the ordination.

Sak's education as a novice accorded with local tradition. He learned to read the "Dhamma" alphabet, which was inscribed in palm-leaf texts. The way it was taught then was by direct transmission, a method called "learning from the mouth of the teacher." As Luang Ta Chi describes the ritual, the novice, carrying the palm-leaf text in his hands, first approached his teacher. "He prostrated to the teacher, then sat with his back to the teacher. The teacher faced the pupil's back. The teacher began reading a few sentences at a time, and the pupil repeated after him. Then the teacher read several sentences at a time, and the pupil repeated after him. The instruction went back and forth in this way until the pupil could remember the sentences by heart. Instruction took place regularly, once each day and sometimes as often as three times a day, depending on the aptitude of the pupil. A bright pupil could progress quickly. For a pupil whose memory was not so good, the instruction would be more gradual."

Most of the texts contained Dhamma stories composed in the past by Buddhist masters. Included among the stories that the monks of Wat Pho Sai imparted to the pupils were The Perfection of the Ten Paramis, the Gatha Unahissawichai, stories extolling merit making, various Jataka stories, and tales of Isan that had been written by local scholars from the northeastern region. The Gatha Unahissawichai was particularly popular in the North and Northeast. People generally asked local monks to chant this *gatha* as a blessing to



prolong life. (Later in his life, in an article called “Fear of Death,” Luang Ta Chi explained the true meaning of Gatha Unahissawichai, a sermon given by the Buddha to the deities.)

Novice Sak loved learning Dhamma from these texts. He was diligent and had an excellent memory. Within six months after his ordination as a novice, Sak was able to read Dhamma texts and write Dhamma script. The script used at this particular monastery was based on an alphabet similar to that of the Burmese. It was evident that Sak was able to learn more quickly than other novices at the monastery. He was able to comprehend the Dhamma lessons inherent in the stories. In addition, he was able to read the literature on his

own; his teacher no longer had to read sentences out loud to him. Not only could Novice Sak read on his own, he was also able to write down the stories.

In village monasteries, monks and novices spent much of their ritual practice reciting from Buddhist texts, often for hours on end. They were also called upon to perform rituals outside the monastery. These might include the consecration of sacred objects or buildings. At funeral rites the monks usually chanted Buddhist suttas designed to transfer merit to the dead and protective texts



*The novices  
in Khamcha-ee district.*



(*paritta*) to purify the households of the laity. They were also requested to conduct purification ceremonies to protect people from ghosts, evil spells, poison, betrayal, knives, guns, and fire, or cure them of various diseases and other maladies. Thus, education in the local wat was dependent on traditional needs. Young monks and novices learned by following the example of elder members of the monastic community. What a young monk or novice saw and emulated was defined by the elders who were closest to him.

At Wat Pho Sai, the novices learned to chant directly from the teacher. This traditional method of teaching “from mouth to mouth” resembled learning to read palm-leaf texts. The teaching monk performed the chant, sentence by sentence, and the novice repeated each sentence after his teacher. So it went, back and forth, back and forth until the novice could recite the entire chant from memory. Once he mastered one chant, the novice progressed to the next. A novice with an excellent memory could recite several chants by heart. A novice with a poor memory often forgot the chant he had learned by heart just the previous day. In such cases, the following morning the teacher had to repeat the chants that he had taught only a day or so before. Due to his excellent memory, Novice Sak was outstanding in his ability to recite accurately. It was easy for him to master all the chants up to “The Seven Texts” (Ched Tamnan). How many chants the teacher would teach depended on the aptitude of each pupil. The best pupils were able to progress to “The Twelve Texts” (Sipsong Tamnan) and learn the entire chant by heart. The Ched Tamnan and Sipsong Tamnan are among the most popular and widely known texts memorized by monks, nuns, novices, and pious laypeople.

Due to his remarkable memory, Novice Sak was able to



recite all the chants that the abbot taught him. The Patimokkha, the core of the Vinaya Pitaka, is the recitation of the 227 monastic rules by an elder (*thera*) of all the monks in the monastery. The ritual takes place twice a month. To the great astonishment of all the village monks, Novice Sak memorized the entire monastic code of discipline, which is about thirteen thousand words long, in only seventeen days. This was not from reading the Patimokkha text but by repeating after his teacher. Such an accomplishment was the sign of a clear mind, serious intent, and great self-discipline.



## State Religious Education



Within the space of four years, Novice Sak had studied all the local literature and had mastered all the chants that his teacher taught him. At this time the novice learned that there was a Naktham school at Wat Phosikaeo (Monastery of the Splendid Bodhi). Wat Phosikaeo is located south of the provincial capital of Nakhon Phanom in Khamcha-ee subdistrict. The Naktham (literally meaning “skilled in Buddhist teachings”) is part of the religious education curriculum created by Prince Wachirayan (1860-1921). The prince was the head of the Dhammayut order and became Sangharaja of Siam in 1910. Prince Wachirayan, who was the half brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), was also

an architect of the Sangha Act of 1902. The passage of this act put the many religious traditions that existed in Siam at that time under the jurisdiction of the Sangha bureaucracy and put all the Sangha affairs under the jurisdiction of the Thai government. From then on, only those monks who studied the state monastic curriculum and passed the state examinations could be appointed abbots. There are three levels of the primary courses and seven levels of the advanced courses. In order of increasing difficulty, the three levels of primary courses are Naktham Three, the first requirement, Naktham Two, and Naktham One. In order of increasing difficulty, the seven levels of the advanced courses in Pali studies are numbered Parian Three up to Parian Nine.



*Gifts for village monks wrapped in homespun cotton.*

In Novice Sak's day, those novices and monks who wished to pursue Pali studies had to go to monasteries in urban areas where the Parian curriculum was being taught. The Naktham courses, however, came to be taught in many rural monasteries. These very courses had been taught by the monks at Wat Phosikaeo for a number of years before Novice Sak arrived there in 1943. In this fourth year of his novicehood, Novice Sak traveled back and forth from his village monastery to Wat Phosikaeo in order to study the Naktham. This was Novice Sak's first encounter with the state religious curriculum that monks and novices in Bangkok had been studying since the year 1912. Novice Sak loved learning new things, and the study of these religious texts made Sak feel "like a fish in new water." The young novice studied hard in order to fulfill his goal of passing the lowest level of the Naktham in the same year that he arrived at Wat Phosikaeo.

The Naktham examination took place in the district town of Mukdahan. The novices went there on foot. There was no electricity then. Luang Ta Chi has described what the novices went through. "We started early in the morning. From Khamcha-ee we walked to Mukdahan, a distant of some forty kilometers. We walked through a forest and went over a hill. The trail was very narrow. We stayed overnight at a wat in town. The day we headed back it rained hard, and it got terribly dark. By the time we arrived at our wat, it was midnight."

When the results of the examination were posted, it was clear that Novice Sak had realized his aspiration. Not only did he pass the exam with flying colors, he ranked first among the monastic pupils who took the exam at that time. Having passed Naktham Three, Sak was eager to proceed to the next level.



*Almsround in the village.*

Determined not to miss any classes, Novice Sak left his village monastery and took up residence at Wat Phosikaeo. The following year, in 1944, Novice Sak passed the examination and received the certificate for the second level of the Naktham curriculum. Back then, this was a big accomplishment for a village novice. Novice Sak would have liked to continue his studies to Naktham One, the highest level. Unfortunately, there were no monks at the monastery who could teach the Naktham One courses. Unable to study the textbooks on his own, Novice Sak was compelled to terminate his course of study. The senior monks at Wat Phosikaeo asked him to teach the lowest level of Naktham at the monastery. He was nineteen years old then. Novice Sak continued to reside at Wat Phosikaeo as a teacher of Naktham Three.





## Monastic Life in Bangkok



When Novice Sak turned twenty, he took higher ordination as a monk at Wat Phosikaeo. Venerable Teacher Lun Khemiyo, the Sangha head of Khamcha-ee subdistrict, was his preceptor. Venerable Lamkaeo Yanwaro was his first ordination teacher, and Venerable Pheng Surakhito was his second ordination teacher. Thus, on March 16, 1945, Novice Sak became a *bhikkhu*. He was given a monastic name, Chiwanantho. But the monk is still known by his first name, Surasak.

Like many young monks of his day, Phra Surasak was drawn to the state monastic curriculum and wished to study advanced courses at a prestigious monastery in the capital city. He had, of course, heard about Wat Mahathat in Bangkok and its outstanding curricula in all fields: administration, religious education, propagation, Buddhist liturgy, liturgical customs and traditions, monastic law, public instruction, and

preaching. In November 1945, nine months after he became a monk, Phra Surasak traveled to the capital city. At the time, Venerable Phimontham (Choi) was the abbot of Wat Mahathat. Phra Surasak lived at Wat Mahathat for over four years. Luang Ta Chi recalled, “Venerable Phimontham (Choi) influenced me by his scrupulous behavior, his piety, his sincerity, and his punctuality.”

He learned as much as he could from various teachers there, successfully passing the highest level of the Naktham course and attaining the Parian Four degree. Phra Surasak was now called Maha Surasak. “Maha” is a title given to monks and, sometimes, novices who have studied Pali and passed the examination for at least Parian Three.

One of the experiences that Maha Surasak would never forget took place at Wat Mahathat when he was a student



*Phramaha Surasak  
Jivanando  
33 years old.*

there. When the young monk first arrived in Bangkok, World War II had just ended. There was a terrible scarcity of food. The cost of living was very high. Since food was in short supply, the government had to issue ration coupons to insure that everyone got at least some food. Due to the shortages, not many people were able to offer food to monastics on almsround. Phra Surasak often went without. Monks as well as novices endured many hardships.

It was not uncommon for them to receive no food on a given day, to have had nothing at all to eat. The monastic code of discipline, the Vinaya, prohibited monks from eating after noontime. But during this period many monks and novices got nothing to eat, either for breakfast or lunch. Such

hardships taught Maha Surasak to cultivate enormous patience. He learned to be completely self-reliant. Without food to sustain their bodies, young monks and novices had a hard time concentrating on their studies. Maha Surasak has said, “Hunger is torment. I learned what starvation was like. Still I endured.” In order to cajole his mind to focus on his studies, Maha Surasak came up with a trick. He picked a gatha that appealed to him in order to empower his mind. By reciting the gatha over and over, he managed to keep his spirits up. He accepted that receiving no food on almsround was the way things were. By not harboring any expectations that food would be forthcoming, hunger and the desire to eat could not disturb his mind. Maha Surasak persevered through the lean time with the aid of this skillful device. The young monk transformed physical hunger into the training of his mind. By enduring hunger, Maha Surasak cultivated such virtues as patience, inner strength, resolve, steadfastness, and self-sacrifice.

Ajan Buddhadasa, the elder preacher who has been Maha Surasak’s greatest source of inspiration, has explained that we must distinguish between two kinds of hungers. Physical hunger, which is a natural process of life, causes no problems. Spiritual hunger, which is the hunger of thinking born out of attachment, brings a lot of *dukkha* (suffering). “With mindfulness and wisdom, physical hunger is no problem. Don’t foolishly make it into *dukkha*. When it arises, just see it as *tathata* (thusness), the state of being ‘just like that.’ The body has a nervous system. When it



lacks something that it needs, there arises a certain activity which we call 'hunger.' That is all there is to it - tathata. Don't let it cook up into spiritual hunger by attaching to it as 'my hunger' or the 'I who hunger.' That is very dangerous, for it causes a lot of dukkha."

Although he was only twenty-five, Maha Surasak knew that he loved the Dhamma with all his heart. "I learned that only the Dhamma could inspire people to live a wholesome life. I made a firm resolution to put my mind to studying the Dhamma, to understanding the way of the Buddha so that I could convey my knowledge to laypeople and inspire them to live their lives according to the Dhamma." Maha Surasak had such confidence in his training that he was willing and eager to work in any field for the religion.

In 1947 Venerable Phimontham (Choi) passed away. A replacement was appointed abbot of Wat Mahathat in Bangkok with the same title, Phimontham.

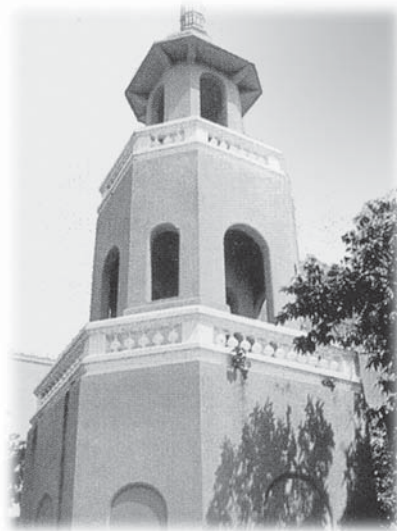


The new abbot was then forty-five years old. His original name was At; his monastic name was Assapha. He was usually referred to as Phra Phimontham.

Ajan At was born in 1903 in Ton Village in Ban Ton commune, today in Khon Kaen province. In 1916 he was ordained as a novice at Wat Sichan. His preceptor was Ya Khu No, who taught him to read Dhamma script from palm-leaf texts. When he was sixteen, Novice At attended a training course for teachers at an elementary school. He passed the exam and became a teacher at an elementary school at

Wat Klang, Muang Kao commune. In 1920, when he was eighteen, Novice At resigned from his teaching post and traveled to Bangkok in order to study Pali. In Bangkok he stayed at Wat Chanasongkram (Wat Tongpu) for a year before moving to Wat Mahathat. In 1923 he was ordained as a monk by Phra Dhammatrailokachan (Heng Khemachari), the abbot of Wat Mahathat who was later to become Somdet Phra Wanarat. The somdet was usually referred to as Somdet Heng. In 1929, five years after his ordination, Phra Maha At passed the Parian Eight exam. In 1935, Maha At was appointed abbot of Wat Suwandaram in Ayuthaya. He was then thirty-two years old.

In November 1938 Somdet Wannarat (Phae Tissara Thera), abbot of Wat Suthat in Bangkok, was elevated by the government to the position of Sangharaja, the administrative head of the Thai Sangha. This was the first time in eighty-four years that a Mahanikai elder was appointed Sangharaja. Between 1854 and 1937 the position of Thai Sangharaja had been held exclusively by Dhammayut monks.



In 1941 the Thai government, under Prime Minister Phibun, passed the new democratic Sangha Act that replaced the 1902 Sangha Act. The 1941 Sangha Act became the new law providing for the administration of the Thai Sangha. The central administration, located in Bangkok, consisted of four departments: Education, Public Works, Propagation, and Interior. Venerable

Phimontham (At) was appointed Sangha Minister of the Interior, an appointment permitted under the new Sangha Act of 1941.

During this period, Phra Phimontham attempted to reform and revitalize Thai Buddhism by integrating meditation practice with textual studies. He urged all monks and novices to combine book learning with meditation practice. He also encouraged laypeople to practice *vipassana* (insight) meditation in accordance with the Maha Satipatthana Sutta.

In 1949 Phra Phimontham invited skilled meditation masters from northeastern Thailand, who represented various local traditions, to come to Wat Mahathat in Bangkok



and train monks and novices in *samatha* (tranquillity) meditation. These meditation teachers came from northeastern provinces such as Nongkhai, Khonkaen, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Ubon Ratchathani. Nearly all who took part in the intensive trainings were fully ordained monks. There was, however, one novice, Sobin Namto, who joined in the meditation program. Novice Sobin,

who was already in residence at Wat Mahathat, was nineteen years old when he underwent intensive meditation training at this monastery. The monks and the novice lived and meditated in tiny rooms for many months. One of the most revered meditation teachers at Wat Mahathat was Phra Maha Chodok Yanasithi (1918-88). Maha Chodok was born in a Lao village in Khonkaen province in the northeastern region. His father had many skills and was much respected by the villagers. He was a farmer, carpenter, blacksmith, and herbal



doctor. Chodok went to the state school in his village and finished primary education after turning fourteen. In 1934 he ordained as a novice and took higher ordination when he reached the age of twenty. Like many young monks of his time, Phra Chodok wanted to go to Bangkok to study Pali. In 1939 he became a disciple of Somdet Heng Khemachari, then abbot of Wat Mahathat. While residing at Wat Mahathat, Phra Chodok passed the highest level in the Pali studies program. In 1943 Maha Chodok returned to Khonkaen to teach advanced religious courses, which he did for six years. In 1949 he was called back to Bangkok by Phra Phimontham (At), the new abbot of Wat Mahathat. In Bangkok, Maha Chodok took up vipassana meditation at Wat Rakhang (Bell Monastery), under the guidance of Venerable Teacher Suk (Bhavanaphiram Thera).

In 1951 Venerable Phimontham established the Vipassana Meditation Center at Wat Mahathat to promote meditation practice among monks and laypeople. Venerable Phimontham was the first high-ranking abbot, since the passage of the Sangha Act of 1902, to encourage town monks to combine the study of Pali texts with meditation practice. Venerable Phimontham's reform was partly influenced by a religious revival in Burma and by Prime Minister U Nu's support of meditation for monks and laity. Ajan Phimontham felt that the Burmese style of vipassana meditation would be easy to learn and beneficial for Thai urbanites.



At this time Maha Surasak was still living at Wat Mahathat. While studying Pali at Wat Mahathat, Maha Surasak also practiced meditation under the guidance of a number of meditation masters in Bangkok and Thonburi. Among his teachers were Ajan Phatthanta Wilasa, a Burmese meditation master living at Wat Donyannawa; Venerable Father Sot (Phra Mongkhonthepmuni) of Wat Paknam; and Ajan Bhavanaphiram (Suk) of Bell Monastery. Maha Surasak also studied the Abhidhamma under Ajan Sai Saikasem, a Burmese lay teacher at Bell Monastery in Thonburi. Studying the texts helped deepen his understanding of both samatha and vipassana meditation.

In 1952 Venerable Phimontham took Maha Chodok to Burma for an intensive vipassana meditation training at the meditation center of the Burmese master Mahasi Sayadaw.



A year later Maha Chodok returned to Bangkok with two Burmese meditation masters, one of whom was his teacher. Since 1953, Wat Mahathat has been offering vipassana meditation training to people from all walks of life. Town as well as village monks from other provinces travel to Wat Mahathat for meditation retreats. Venerable Maha Chodok supervised the meditation center at Wat Mahathat from 1953 to

1960. In 1960 the meditation hall was destroyed by the police under the order of Field Marshal Sarit.



## Working for His Homeland



*Village scene*

Maha Surasak wanted to further his Pali studies in Bangkok, but his preceptor in the northeastern region asked him to return to Wat Phosikaeo in order to work for the sangha of Khamcha-ee. Preceptor Lun, then serving as abbot of Wat Phosikaeo and the sangha head of Khamcha-ee, had a lot of work cut out for his disciple. Thus, in 1951 Maha Surasak took a long journey back home to Khamcha-ee, about 740 kilometers northeast of Bangkok.

Maha Surasak was the first monk from Wat Phosikaeo to receive a Pali degree from Bangkok. He was also the first monk in the entire subdistrict of Khamcha-ee to return to his home monastery to teach young monks and novices not only the state religious curriculum but meditation as well

At Wat Phosikaeo there were only a few monks skilled enough in management, bookkeeping, and the like to take up the work of administering the four departments of Khamcha-ee subdistrict. Maha Surasak had the most experience, since he had been trained in various fields while residing at Wat Mahathat in Bangkok. In Khamcha-ee, Maha Surasak was asked to take on work that was normally the responsibility of the sangha heads of the education, public works, propagation, and interior departments. Maha Surasak took up this heavy workload so that the administration of the district sangha would go on smoothly. Officially, Maha Surasak was not granted the title of district sangha chief of education, public works, propagation, or administration. But in reality he was shouldering the workloads of all four department chiefs in addition to teaching the three levels of Naktham courses at Wat Phosikaeo.

Maha Surasak was unable to find any monks in the district who could serve as assistant teachers in the Naktham classes. He taught both morning and afternoon classes for three years without help while he remained the only Naktham teacher. He did not mind the formidable workload. Because he loved his work, it continually energized him. To him, serving the religion is serving the Buddha.

Within five years of his return to Khamcha-ee, Maha Surasak was appointed by the Thai Sangha to serve in the following positions:

- *In 1951 he was appointed master teacher of the*

*Pariyattidhamma School at Wat Phosikaeo;*

- *In 1952 he was appointed sangha head of the education department in Khamcha-ee district;*

- *In 1953 he was named examiner to level three of Naktham students in Nakhon Phanom province;*

- *In 1955 Maha Surasak succeeded his teacher as abbot of Wat Phosikaeo, and in the same year he was also appointed preceptor and sangha head of Khamcha-ee.*

Maha Surasak devoted his life to the educational progress of young monks and novices in Khamcha-ee. During the time that he was teaching the Naktham courses at Wat Phosikaeo, two of his students ranked first in the annual Naktham examination in the northeastern region for two years in a row, 1954 and 1955. Maha Surasak sent young monks and novices to be educated at well-known monastic schools in other provinces. The best students were sent to the monastic schools in Bangkok for advanced courses. Maha Surasak's intention all along was to educate young monks and novices effectively in the acquisition of Dhamma wisdom so that in serving the religion, they would insure that Buddhism would continue to prosper.

As the sangha head of Khamcha-ee, Ajan Surasak had the responsibility and the necessary power to manage religious affairs in the district. Not only did he work tirelessly to improve the level of knowledge of local monks, the sangha grew more efficient in all departments: interior, education, and propagation. Under Ajan Surasak's exemplary leadership there was much improvement in communication and cooperation between the sangha and local people.

Maha Surasak believed that the physical world was inseparably intertwined with the spiritual. Mundane activities could be spiritually useful when done with the proper



*Village ceremony*

attitude. Between the years 1953 and 1954, Ajan Surasak led his fellow monks, novices, and laypeople in the construction of school buildings for village children. Since villagers were afraid of being punished by the spirits that guarded the trees, having the monks working alongside gave them a sense of security. In those days, when the forests of Khamcha-ee were still very dense, Luang Ta Chi recalls that they had to go to great lengths in

order to get lumber. “The monks, novices and villagers had to walk some distance to get to the other side of the hill. We had to spend several nights in the forest. The villagers felled as many trees as we needed. The monks and novices sawed the logs into lumber. We used oxcarts to transport all the planks to the site of the school. The monks and novices did most of the hard labor. The entire process took twenty days.” The hardwood *mai phan chat* trees that they cut down were the best trees to use for the school building. According to Luang Ta Chi, “The mai phan chat is so strong that even if you were to submerge it in water for a hundred years, it will not rot.”





*Building a rice granary*

In Khamcha-ee the construction of the roads was also a communal undertaking in which Ajan Surasak and his fellow monks and novices worked alongside village folk. In the 1950s forested land was still available to anyone willing to clear it. Ajan Surasak encouraged the villagers of Khamcha-



ee to have their own gardens, to grow vegetables and other crops. The result was that the villagers were able to feed their families, sell their surplus, and have some income.

In compliance with the instructions of his teacher, Venerable Phimontham, abbot of Wat Mahathat, Ajan Surasak had been teaching young monks, novices, and laypeople to practice meditation. As the Sangha Minister of Interior, Venerable

*A Phu Thai girl in Khmcha-ee district.*



Phimontham encouraged his fellow monks in all provinces to instruct monastics as well as laypeople in meditation practice in accordance with the Maha Satipatthana text.

In the early 1950s Ajan Surasak established a forest hermitage in Khamcha-ee. This, too, was done to honor the instructions of his teacher, Venerable Phimontham. The new forest wat was to serve as a place of solitude in which monks and laypeople could practice meditation without distraction. The forests of Khamcha-ee and Mukdahan were known among ascetic monks as particularly suitable places in which to practice meditation. The remote wilderness of these forests served as a sanctuary in which the monks could train their minds. In addition, the villagers who offered them food on almsround had strong faith and liked to practice meditation as well. In the early decades of the twentieth century, one wandering ascetic monk spent as many as ten rains retreats in a cave in the forests of Khamcha-ee.



## Subduing Ghosts and Spirits

Villagers in the Northeast devoted much attention and effort to appease or ward off one ghost or spirit after another. In Khamcha-ee, along with Buddhism, the practice of spirit worship played a major role in village life. These spirits were always identified with features specific to the locale or with individual persons: they were the guardians of villages; spirits of trees, ponds, or streams; or ghosts of the dead. Villagers asked the spirits for favors or for their protection; they sought to escape the spirits' pranks; they searched for cures for their illnesses. Many villagers turned to spirit doctors when they fell ill. Treating illness was the most common task that these doctors performed. The belief in local spirits and ghosts was an integral part of the villagers' world.

Villagers believed that the spirits that inhabited the Khamcha-ee area were particularly fierce. Local people, as well as the officials who were stationed in Khamcha-ee, tended to die from a mysterious disease. They felt fatigue, numbness, and weakness in the limbs and extremities that left them no strength with which to plow the paddy fields or plant crops. Luang Ta Chi believed that the so-called mysterious disease might well be beriberi. His eldest brother had died of beriberi.



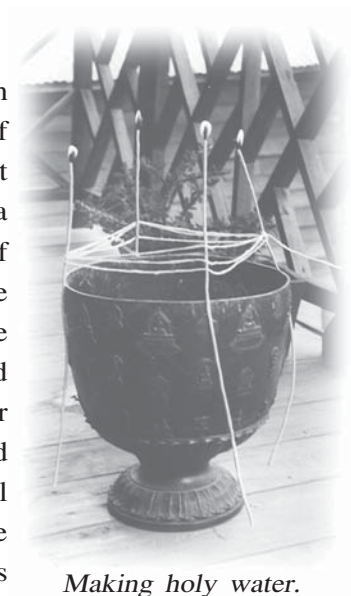
*Women attending a village Wat*

Luang Ta Chi recalls another Khamcha-ee mystery. “Local people,” he says, “as well as the officials who drank the cool water that flowed swiftly from a stream emerging from a local cave often ended up dead. Those who survived came to the monastery every holy day and stayed overnight to observe precepts. I sprinkled holy water on them for protection. Psychologically, the holy water helped them feel comfortable in their hearts.” At the monastery there were a number of rest houses (called *sala* in Thai) to accommodate visitors who stayed overnight. A sala is a multipurpose, open-sided, roofed structure mounted on posts that is often used as a rest house, preaching hall, and meeting place. Luang Ta Chi recalls, “Those who spent the night at the wat to observe precepts seldom got sick. So more and more people came to the wat to practice Dhamma. On some holy days the crowd was so big that there was not enough space in the salas for everybody to lie down and sleep.”

Ajan Surasak taught people in Khamcha-ee to overcome their fear of ghosts and evil spirits. To convert people from spirit worship, Maha Surasak replaced the custom of making sacrificial offerings with the custom of taking refuge in the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha). Instead of placing their hopes on the help that might be gained from a wide array of spirits, local people were encouraged to take refuge in the Triple Gem. In his sermons the abbot explained the Buddha's teachings on action and on karma. By taking refuge in the Triple Gem, the villagers committed themselves to the act of taking full responsibility for their choices and intentions. The abbot taught that they could gain true happiness by creating virtuous actions and avoiding unskillful actions.

Ajan Surasak taught the villagers to practice meditation and to observe the Five Precepts. Briefly, these precepts enjoin one to refrain from killing, from stealing, from unmindful speech, from sexual misconduct, and from using intoxicants. This indispensable ritual provided the people with a means of protection from punishing spirits. It was more than a magical means of protection against evil spirits; it was a method of guarding the mind. Villagers acquired behavior that might harm others or themselves.

As abbot and community leader, Maha Surasak was able to convince the villagers that the Dhamma could protect them better than the spirits. Many people were ready to



*Making holy water.*

abandon their beliefs in ghosts and spirits, provided they could still feel protected. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem gave them this security. In teaching local people meditation, Maha Surasak offered “do-it-yourself” methods so that villagers could ward off attacking spirits and protect themselves. These included reciting gathas, practicing meditation, and observing precepts. Meditation practice, as taught by Maha Surasak, calmed their fears and gave them confidence in their own spiritual powers.

Although Ajan Surasak preached against performing rituals such as killing animals to placate ghosts, he did not chal-



*Phu Thai healing ceremony  
in Mukdahan.*

lenge the spirit doctors’ methods of healing through herbal medicine. At that time in Khamcha-ee the chief spirit doctor was a woman skilled in healing. Her daughter, like her mother, was both a spirit doctor and healer. Luang Ta Chi recalled, “Even the chief spirit doctor and her daughter came to the wat regularly to observe the precepts. Both of them became dhamma practitioners.”

In less than a decade after Maha Surasak had returned to Khamcha-ee, he was able to awaken a large number of people. An increasing number of monks,



novices, and laypeople were devoted to practicing *sila-dhamma*. Every holy day, young men and women and old people came to the wat to listen to the sermons, to observe the precepts, to offer *dana* (charity), and to practice meditation. The abbot was able to convince people to live their lives according to the Dhamma. Ajan Surasak devoted himself wholeheartedly, physically, mentally, and spiritually, to develop qualities in members of the sangha and in laypeople that would enable them to continue the work of Lord Buddha. From the perspective of the local sangha, the ten years between 1950 and 1960 was the golden decade of Buddha-Dhamma in Khamcha-ee.



## Hearing Sermons from Metteyya

During the 1954 rains retreat there were not many monks at Wat Phosikaeo. This was a year before Ajan Surasak became abbot of the wat. As usual Ajan Surasak carried a heavy workload. In the evenings he gave sermons and taught meditation to monastics and laypeople. His youngest pupils were two novices named Riap and Thira, both of whom lived with him. Riap, born in 1942, was then only twelve years old. Thira was a little older than Riap. Both novices had just finished their primary education under lay teachers at the government school located in the wat compound. Novice Riap's parents were Phu Thaippeople from northern Laos who had settled in various villages of Sakhon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Mukdahan. The Phu Thai dialect is closer to Lao than it is to central Thai language.

Riap was ordained as a novice at Wat Ban Hai and went from there to study at Wat Phosikaeo. He had studied Thai language in school, but he could not speak Thai fluently. In everyday life Riap spoke Phu Thai. His name in Phu Thai is pronounced Hiap. The other novice, Thira, was ordained at Wat Nong Phonoi and had come to Wat Phosikaeo to study at the school.

Ajan Surasak taught two kinds of meditation: *kasina* (a type of concentration meditation) and *satipatthana* (the four foundations of mindfulness). Kasina is a class of meditation techniques in which the practitioner concentrates on a particular image, commits it to memory, and recalls the image as a way to achieve meditative absorption or full con-



*Phu Thai women in Khamcha-ee.*

centration. Ajan Surasak usually taught a form of kasina meditation called the *pathavi* (earth) kasina.

One evening Ajan Surasak began to teach a group of villagers and novices a practice in which a statue of the Buddha is the object of concentration. The practice begins with putting the mind in the proper attitude. Ajan Surasak told the meditators to establish firmly in their minds an altruistic motivation for the practice of meditation. They lit candles and incense sticks to pay respect to the Buddha image in front of them. Then they crossed their legs in a lotus position, and the monk gave them instructions. “Focus your mind on the Buddha in front of you. Memorize the

details of the statue,” he said. “Once these are clear in your mind, close your eyes. Visualize the Buddha image in your mind. Make it exactly the same size as the image you just saw. Do not let your mind drift from the Buddha image. Recite the mantra *Buddha-rupam, Buddha-rupam, Buddha-rupam* (Buddha-form) as you focus your mind on the Buddha image.” This kind of visualization can work well with people who are very visual or have strong *saddha* (faith). After twenty minutes or so some villagers were excited to discover that they were able to visualize the Buddha image clearly. Others said the image was blurred. After an hour of meditation, the monk told them all to open their eyes.

At the monastery the two novices, Thira and Riap, practiced meditation intensively under Ajan Surasak’s guidance. The Ajan told the novices to develop firm conviction and to sit in the lotus position for one hour, not moving their bodies. “Close your eyes. Visualize the Buddha image as exactly the same size as the image you saw when your eyes were open. Look at every detail of the Buddha image so that



it becomes clearer and clearer.” Both novices were able to follow the instruction for an hour. They saw the Buddha image clearly with their eyes closed. An hour later the novices opened their eyes. They were given a twenty minute break before they resumed meditation.

Next Ajan Surasak gave the novices the in-

struction to enlarge and reduce the size of the Buddha image so that their minds would not drift from their object of concentration. “Focus your mind on the Buddha image. Once the Buddha image becomes clearer and clearer in your mind, develop the firm intention to enlarge the image. Slowly make the image bigger and bigger. Do not make the image bigger than your own body. Now develop the firm intention to shrink the image. Slowly make the image smaller and smaller until it becomes its normal size—the same size that you see when your eyes are open. Do not reduce the image to a tiny size. Otherwise, you will not be able to see it.”

The practice of kasina meditation needed to be closely supervised by a skilled teacher. Ajan Surasak warned the young novices to follow his guidance. “When you enlarge the Buddha image you must be very mindful. If you do not follow the instruction strictly, the enlargement can get out of hand. The Buddha image might get so huge that it falls on top of you. The same goes for the shrinking process. If the reduction gets out of hand, the image might become so tiny that you lose it. In either case, the unfortunate result could drive the meditator crazy.”

The novices lived with the monk, and because they were still young, they were able to stay more focused than most laypeople, whose minds have a tendency to stray to outside responsibilities, worries, and concerns. To keep them from getting lethargic or sleepy, Ajan Surasak taught the novices to develop the firm intention to visualize the Buddha with six rays of light emanating from the image. Both novices obediently followed their teacher’s instruction. In their meditation they saw the Buddha’s multicolored image radiating six colorful rays of bright light. They exclaimed with great joy, “I saw the Buddha! How beautiful! So colorful!”

Seeing that the two novices were making quick progress in meditation, in August 1954 Ajan Surasak took Riap and Thira to stay at the nearby forest wat that he had recently established. While living in the forest, away from village distractions, the two novices made steady progress. Their power of concentration was quickly developed. Most importantly, they had strong faith. It was with such strong faith and confidence in the teacher that they attained *jhana* (meditative absorption). During these two weeks of intensive training they were able to remain in *jhana* for as long as they chose. They were also able to emerge quickly on their own. Ajan Surasak recalled, “At first, each novice’s mind could stay one-pointed for only five to ten minutes, then from half an hour to an hour, gradually from two to four hours, and finally for six hours at a stretch. For example, if they established the firm intention to be in *samadhi* for three hours, they were able to come out of *jhana* on their own at the end of three hours. But if you tried to shake them out of the concentration before the three hours were over, they would not come out. Their *samadhi* was so strong that even if you pulled on their legs, shook them or held a lit match to their arms they would not feel anything.”

Ajan Surasak was amazed by the rapidity with which the young novices learned to enter the *jhana* state, control its duration, and emerge from it so quickly. Furthermore, by the time the novices came out of *jhana*, their whole demeanor had changed. While walking to the village on almsround, Riap and Thira became exceptionally mindful and graceful. Even the villagers noticed the changes in the way the novices conducted themselves. After Riap and Thira had been meditating regularly, their minds became unified within a very short time after they sat down, crossed their legs, and



closed their eyes.

One day Riap remained in jhana for twenty-four hours, all day and all night. While his mind was still in samadhi the novice told his teacher that he had gone to Dusit heaven (in Pali, Tusita), seen a *bodhisat* and listened to a sermon the bodhisat gave. Riap then gave the whole teaching, word for word, that he heard from the bodhisat. As Ajan Surasak listened to the novice, he realized that the image that Riap saw fit the description of the future Buddha. A bodhisat is a local term for one who strives, over many lives and through determined practice of the spiritual perfections (*parami*), to attain full awakening as a Buddha and thus benefit all beings. In Pali he is called Metteyya Bodhisatta; in Sanskrit, Bodhisattva Maitreya.

To Ajan Surasak's surprise, the novice spoke in central Thai, not Phu Thai. Novice Riap spoke for over an hour. Listening to the words coming out of the twelve-year-old pupil made Maha Surasak wonder. "This sermon could not possibly come out of the novice's own head. Riap was a Phu Thai boy, and he was not fluent in central Thai. He could not even pronounce the letter R in Thai correctly. Besides, Riap was a stutterer. Yet when he was in samadhi, which he was when he delivered the sermon, Riap spoke beautifully; he never stuttered once. Every word was clearly enunciated. It did not sound like him at all. He was too young to know these Dhamma terms. It was as if the novice was serving as a loudspeaker for Metteyya Bodhisatta's words." When the novice came out of meditative absorption, he did not remember what he had said, and he stuttered when answering his teacher's questions.

Soon the news that Novice Riap had seen Metteyya Bodhisatta spread to the provincial town by word of mouth.

There were no telephones yet, even as late as 1954. At this time the Mahanikai sangha chief of Nakhon Phanom province was Venerable Maha Khaeo Uthummala (born in 1907). He was also abbot of Wat Phrathat Phanom (Monastery of the Sacred Relic at Phanom), one of the most sacred sites for the Lao Buddhists. The sangha chief sent a telegram to Maha Surasak, asking him to bring Novice Riap to Wat Phrathat Phanom. At Wat Phrathat Phanom the abbot had taught meditation to a fourteen-year-old girl who was able to sit in samadhi for three hours. But Riap was younger than this girl; he was only twelve.



*Wat Phrathat  
Phanom in 1954*

Ajan Surasak arrived at Wat Phrathat Phanom with Novice Riap in the middle of August, 1954. The monks in residence there came up with the idea of using the novice's exceptional gift to draw people to the wat. Wat Phrathat Phanom is on the west bank of the Mekong river, and the people living around the wat were mostly Lao and Phu Thai. The abbot urged the villagers to come hear the novice deliver a sermon from Mett- eyya Bodhisatta. Every night Ajan Surasak told Riap to create the firm intention to see the

Bodhisatta again. Riap followed the instruction. Riap preached for three nights to huge audiences. These events generated tremendous excitement. Lao and Phu Thai villagers were already familiar with the story of Metteyya, and they were eager to hear his teachings.

Buddhists in northern and northeastern Thailand believe Metteyya will come to earth to lead people out of *samsara*, the cycle of death and rebirth. Furthermore, they believe that when the future Buddha appears, only the pure in heart and life will be able to see him. These beliefs stem from the tradition, upheld at local temples, in which monks preached the legend of Phra Malai, the arahant who went to Tavamtisa heaven and met Metteyya there. This legend was preached annually at Buddhist villages throughout Nakhon Phanom province. From the preachers the faithful villagers learned that the Bodhisatta asked Phra Malai to describe the material and spiritual conditions in the human world, for he was concerned about the well-being of the people on earth. In one version of this story, Metteyya says to Phra Malai, “As a result of my listening attentively to the Dhamma, when I am enlightened, people will be able to perceive the meaning of the Dhamma. I led a virtuous life. Therefore, all beings will be virtuous and will succeed in following the precepts. I devoted myself to practicing generosity and upholding the precepts. I hope to put an end to sensual defilements. I encourage people to practice good works and urge them to accumulate merit without ceasing. I am determined to help living beings cross over the flood of *samsara*, which is fraught with danger.”



*Small Vihara at Wat Phrathat Phanom*

For three nights in a row, laypeople flocked to Wat Phrathat Phanom to listen to Metteyya's sermons. Novice Riap became concentrated as soon as he sat down and was able to enter jhana quickly. Luang Ta Chi recalls, "Then the Dhamma teachings from Metteya came out of his mouth. He spoke of the perfection of generosity (*dana*), the virtue of moral conduct (*sila*), the development of the mind (*samadhi*), and the cultivation of wisdom (*panna*). After the novice finished delivering the sermons, many people asked him questions, and he answered all the questions while he was still in samadhi. Each session lasted about two hours."

The local people in Nakhon Phanom were elated to hear Metteyya speak. Every night villagers came to listen to Metteyya's sermons. The Dhamma so deeply moved them

that they kept putting money into the almsbowls at the wat until all the bowls were full. (The money would go to the maintenance and upkeep of the stupa.) On the third night as many as two thousand people showed up. Luang Ta Chi explained, “Back then, this kind of gathering to hear a sermon was considered a huge crowd. In the 1950s, local news did not spread far. It stayed local. If such a thing had happened a few decades later, news like this would have been on the front pages of the national newspapers.” At Wat Phrathat Phanom people could hardly find any space in which to sit down. Again, Novice Riap focused his mind on Metteyya. He then recited in Thai the sermon he heard from the future Buddha. Elderly monks in the audience were stunned to hear the depth of Dhamma that the young novice conveyed. They considered it impossible for a boy his age to have made up such Dhamma teachings.

In the audience there was a Dhammayut monk named Maha Duang. He was highly skeptical and decided to test the novice. He asked Riap, “Why should people come to hear Metteyya’s sermon?” The reply that came out of the young novice was this: “Because of their strong faith in Metteyya, they will listen to his sermon with pure hearts. When such strong faith purifies their hearts, they are receptive to the Dhamma. In this state of mind the Dhamma can penetrate their hearts without difficulty. Because of their joy in hearing the Dhamma, people make offerings out of the purity of their hearts. Such giving is the most virtuous and brings the greatest merit.”





*Phrathat Phanom gate*

Hearing Novice Riap's answer convinced Maha Duang that the novice was telling the truth about having met the future Buddha. The Dhammayut monk later told the sangha chief of Nakhon Phanom that he expected the novice to give a conventional reply such as, "Because people will gain a lot of merit from hearing Metteyya's sermon." Later on, in his old age, Luang Ta Chi tells us, "Such a statement would place the importance on the figure of a supernatural being instead of on the Dhamma. Had the novice said that, the Dhammayut monk would have concluded that the boy had made the whole thing up. The elders in the audience were



convinced that it was Metteyya who spoke through the novice. Once the novice came out of samadhi he could not remember the contents of the sermons or the answers he gave to people's questions."

Some people thought that Novice Riap was serving as a medium for Metteyya. In other words, they believed Metteyya had possessed the young Riap and spoke through the novice. Skeptics thought that Riap's teacher used the power of his own concentrated mind to transmit the sophisticated Dhamma words to the novice in meditation. To this accusation Maha Surasak replied, "How could I do that? As a teacher I couldn't possibly match the Dhamma expressions that came out of my pupil's mouth." The teacher himself could not come up with a scientific explanation.

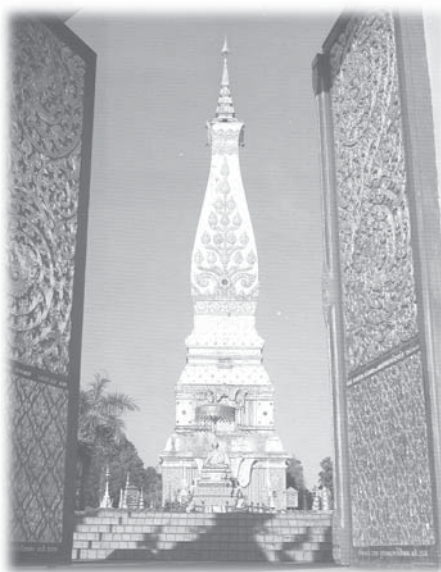
When the rains retreat ended in October, relatives of Riap and Thira came to take the two novices back to their home villages. News about the novices' unusual abilities had spread far and wide, and their parents were concerned about their children's safety. They were afraid that the boys might be taken away. Novice Riap did not want to go home, however. He cried when he paid respect to his teacher just before leaving to go back to his Phu Thai village. This was the last time Ajan Surasak saw Novice Riap. The monk never heard from the novice again. To this day Luang Ta Chi does not know what happened to his young pupil.

He did learn that Novice Thira disrobed after he left the monastery. Thira went to study at a teacher's college and eventually became principal of the community school in his native village. Thira is now retired.

Not long after the event, Maha Duang, who had tried to convince the others that Novice Riap was a fraud, disrobed.



*Monks on almsround at Wat Phrathat Phanom 1995*



*Phrathat Phanom today.*



## Confronting a Dark Force

In September, 1957, a few years after Maha Surasak became sangha administrator of Khamcha-ee, General Sarit headed a coup that resulted in the overthrow of Prime Minister Phibun's government. In October 1958 Field Marshal Sarit abolished the constitution and put the country under martial law. The years 1957 and 1958 signify the beginning of what Thai environmentalists call the "forest-invasion period." In 1960 construction was begun on the first paved road that was to run from Saraburi province in central Thailand to the northeastern region. The road ended in Nakhon Ratchasima, the southernmost province of the northeast. Gravel roads linked Nakhon Ratchasima to Khon Kaen and Udon Thani. The rest of the provinces in the northeast were still isolated; about 42 percent of the northeastern region was still thickly forested.



*Listening to a government official.*

Sarit was born in Bangkok in 1908 but spent his childhood with his mother's Lao family in Mukdahan. Dr. David Wyatt, an American historian who lived in Thailand in 1962-63, has commented on how the Sarit government set out to bring material improvements to the lives of the people. "More than any previous government, it attended to rural needs through highway construction, irrigation, rural electrification and agricultural research and extension work. Particular attention was paid to the most densely populated and poorest regions of the country, and especially to the northeast, where Sarit acted out of his own family background and Lao roots." Between 1950 and 1975, from the Korean War to the Vietnam War, the United States provided Thailand with \$650 million in support of economic development programs. Most of the money was granted in the years after Sarit came to power.

Economic development in Thailand took place in the context of the Vietnam War. The huge amount of economic and military aid coming in from the United States resulted in Thailand's entanglement with the war in Vietnam. Between 1951 and 1971, total U.S. assistance to the Thai military amounted to \$935,900,000. Professor Wyatt states that "Both economic aid and planning were redirected to accommodate security concerns, sparked by an upsurge of antigovernment insurgency, initially in the northeast. Militarily, American aid supported a military buildup in Thailand that was oriented toward Laos and then, increasingly, toward the Vietnam War." During the Vietnam War there were fifty thousand American servicemen stationed in Thailand. U.S. planes took off from American air bases created on Thai soil in Nakhon Sawan, Udon Thani, Nakhon Phanom, and Chonburi provinces to carry out bombing missions over Laos and North

Vietnam. Construction of air bases and strategic highways led to a boom in the Rest-and-Recreation business. Bars, nightclubs, and massage parlors appeared in rural as well as urban areas.

U.S. activities in Thailand and U.S. military and economic aid helped reinforce the social and economic changes brought about by the national economic development program. The government's development policy was formed with the advice of Western-trained economists sent to Thailand in 1957-58 by the World Bank. Sarit's slogan was "Work is money. Money is work. Money brings happiness." In his writing, Ajan Buddhadasa countered with "Work is the value of human life. Work itself is the very practice of Dhamma."

From the perspective of the government that implemented the National Social and Economic Development Plans, Buddhist monks who taught meditation were regarded as obstacles to material progress. The practice of meditation was perceived as unproductive and therefore subversive. All critics, including monastics, of Sarit's government who resisted government efforts to restrain their activities were labeled "communists."

Government development projects increased the contact between officials and villagers in the countryside. Although the villagers needed roads and electricity, the often corrupt officials' patronizing behavior alienated villagers from the government. Civil servants, police officers, and soldiers who interacted with villagers frequently treated them with disdain and discourtesy and were often tempted to exploit them. Corruption was rampant at all levels of government. Villagers had no legal means by which to do anything about their grievances and could express their dissatisfaction only among themselves.





*Listening to a traveling salesman.*

When they were abused by police, district officials, and others, villagers often turned to their local abbots for advice. Ajan Surasak noted that in the northeast most government officials looked down on villagers as inferior. In Khamcha-ee, Luang Ta Chi recalls, “Police often got drunk and mistreated people. If the police did not like some villagers they would arrest and mistreat them without conducting any formal investigations or offering reasons for such arrests. These were official thugs.” There was an old man whom the locals called Uncle Ka. According to Luang Ta Chi’s testimony, “The sergeant who arrested Uncle Ka charged him with being a hooligan. Uncle Ka was thrown in jail for a month. He had done nothing illegal. He came to the wat regularly and lent us a hand whenever the monks needed labor. Uncle Ka was a pious man.” In Luang Ta Chi’s view, “The village police sergeant thinks he is the boss.”

During the time that Thailand was under martial law, the types of monks who were most at risk of being labeled





communists and imprisoned without bail or trial were, as Luang Ta Chi tells us, (1) monks who disagreed with government officials; (2) monks who were critical of government activities, who exhorted officials to behave morally, and who condemned officials for exploiting others; and (3) socially engaged monks who were leaders of their communities.

Under his leadership, Luang Ta Chi has noted, “Wat Phosikaeo was the heart of the community.” Ajan Maha Surasak was highly respected by local people as a gifted preacher. In his sermons the abbot was not afraid of taking a moral stand and criticizing officials who lacked sila-dhamma. Jealous of the abbot’s popularity with local people, the security police accused Ajan Surasak of being a member of a tong, a Chinese secret society. Luang Ta Chi has exclaimed, “How could I be a member of a tong?! I was still a boy when I was ordained as a novice. And I have been in the robes ever since.” In 1960 Ajan Surasak was formally accused of being a communist. The thirty-five-year-old sangha chief of Khamcha-ee was sent to Bangkok to be interrogated by the police. His education took another direction when Ajan Surasak was put into a jail cell already occupied by writers, journalists, lawyers, and activists.



*Village transportation in Khamcha-ee.*

In June 1962 two progressive senior monks were arrested in Bangkok. One was Maha Surasak's teacher, Venerable Phimontham, the Sangha Minister of the Interior. The other was a Dhammayut monk, Venerable Phimontham's deputy minister, Venerable Satsanasophon (Plot), abbot of Wat Rachathiwat. Accused of communist leanings, both monks were forcibly stripped of their robes and ecclesiastical titles. As Venerable Phimontham has recalled, "It was very easy in those days to be accused of being a communist. 'Evidence' of the most tenuous kind could be produced: the fact, for instance, that I am from the northeast: an area where 90 percent of the population are poor farmers. Obviously, it was whispered, this was a breeding ground for agitators. And so, in 1962, I went to prison for five years." Other monks in Bangkok who were wrongly accused and impris-



oned were Maha Nakhon, Maha Sangwien, and Maha Manat.

During this same year, 1962, Sarit replaced the democratic Sangha Act of 1941 with the Sangha Act of 1962, which brought the entire Sangha under tighter control of the central government. In this political climate, any promotion of meditation was perceived as subversive. As Venerable Phimontham has commented, “General Sarit . . . as a dictator, and I, as a monk, were bound not to see eye to eye. He said that if everyone closed his eyes in meditation all the time nobody would be able to keep watch for the communists!” The vipassana meditation center that Venerable Phimontham had established at Wat Mahathat was dismantled. As for the two Burmese meditation masters Venerable Phimontham had invited to Wat Mahathat, one master returned to Burma and the other, Ajan Phatthanta Assapha Thera, went to live in Chonburi, a province eighty kilometers southeast of Bangkok. A meditation center called Wiwekasom was established for this Burmese master by a lay supporter in Chonburi.

Meanwhile, in Khamcha-ee, without the strong leadership of Ajan Surasak, Wat Phosikaeo went into a decline. From 1962 through 1964, Dr. Thomas Kirsch, an American anthropologist who taught at Cornell University, lived among the villagers in Ban Nong Sung, a Phu Thai village six kilometers from Khamcha-ee. Professor Kirsch, who could speak Phu Thai, learned from the villagers in Ban Nong Sung that Phra Maha Surasak and a schoolmaster had been accused of antigovernment activities, arrested, and removed to Bangkok. In those years many Phu Thai villagers in Khamcha-ee were under close surveillance by the Thai police. During this same period, another anthropologist, Dr. Charles Keyes, was doing similar fieldwork in a village in Mahasarakham in the

northeast. He wrote that the people on the west bank of the Mekong continued to identify themselves as Lao. From the late 1960s on, however, they were more and more becoming “Isan” (meaning northeasterners), acquiring an ethnic and cultural identification with the northeastern region of Thailand.



*Anthropologists Thomas Kirsch (center left)  
and Charles F. Keyes  
(center right) in Nong Sung Village, Khamcha-ee  
district, 1963.*

In 1964 Ajan Surasak was released after four years in prison, but it was too risky for him to return to Khamcha-ee. This was during the height of the “red scare,” and the government’s agents of suppression in the northeastern region were seeking out insurgents more aggressively. Several districts in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom provinces (including Mukdahan and Khamcha-ee) rapidly became some of the most politically sensitive, insurgent-dominated districts in the entire northeastern region.



## **Jail: The School of Hard Knocks**

From the day Ajan Surasak first entered prison, his education took a new direction. He maintained his monastic vows and continued to practice meditation. Prison brought him into close contact with many political activists, and Maha Surasak made the most of the situation.

Luang Ta Chi well remembers the suspension of the judicial process in Thailand at the time. In 1958 Prime Minister Sarit abolished the constitution and declared martial law. All opponents of the government, including apolitical critics, were arrested and held for long periods of time without bail or without being brought to trial. “In those days fear enveloped the entire country. The Thai authorities were afraid of communists. Any monks or laypeople who worked for the benefit of their communities were suspected by government officials of being communists or communist sympathizers. Between 1958 and 1960, the police set out to arrest hooligans, bullies, and other criminals nationwide. But instead of capturing only the hooligans, the police rounded up good people, too. Those who arrested innocent people were official thugs. Even pious people were arrested.”

Luang Ta Chi obtained inspiration and encouragement from reading the life story of the Buddha. The abbot recalls, “When the official arrested me, I thought, ‘So what! I haven’t done anything wrong.’ The Buddha teaches us that good men can survive anywhere. During the Buddha’s time, King

Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha, was incarcerated by his son, Ajatasattu. Bimbisara continued to practice Dhamma in prison. For those who live according to the Dhamma, the truth will prevail. Four years went by before the officials finally withdrew the conviction. Once my innocence was established. I resumed the monastic life and my duties as a monk.” Luang Ta Chi states that while he was still in prison, “Several political prisoners tried to convince me to run for a seat in Parliament when we got out. I told them I did not wish to work for the mundane world. A lay life is narrow compared to a monk’s life. In renunciation we can serve all levels of society. I prefer a monk’s life.”

Life in jail provides inmates with an education in the school of hard knocks. Maha Surasak was incarcerated with writers, lawyers, politicians, activists, and social workers. He learned a great deal. His long sentence gave him the time to be introspective. In jail he learned about people from all walks of life. The experience, he says, “deepened my understanding of the Dhamma. It confirmed my conviction in the principle of karma that says our actions do matter. I saw how political prisoners were treated. I saw how different ranks of the security police behaved.” Ajan Surasak saw the true colors of individual officials. He saw that power corrupts. He observed the character of people under pressure and gained a better, broader understanding of human nature. Ajan Surasak came to realize that the prison warders could be good or bad just like any other people. Not all security police officers abused political prisoners; they could tell that most such prisoners were well-educated people.

Maha Surasak used this difficult situation as an opportunity for practice. Luang Ta Chi recalled his daily life dur-



ing his incarceration, a period which lasted from 1960 to 1964. “I behaved as if I were living in the wat. I did the chants, read books, and did my writing. I gave the offering of Dhamma to thousands of inmates in another prison.” The prison officers had regularly taken Maha Surasak to visit the jail for hardened criminals and teach them Dhamma. “There were thousands of inmates in this jail. These were drug addicts and people convicted of a variety of crimes. Every time they heard my Dhamma talk, the prisoners got excited and applauded very loudly.” One day when the warder took Maha Surasak to this prison, as he often did, a government official was also there to lecture the prisoners. Luang Ta Chi recalls, “When the officials began to speak, the prisoners created a ruckus to drown out his voice. After the official finished his speech, the warder led me into the jail. As soon as they saw me, the boisterous prisoners became quiet. All the while I spoke they kept applauding me.” Maha Surasak encouraged the prisoners to change their attitudes and behaviors. “Anyone can make mistakes. It is water under the bridge. Resolve to do good and start a new life. We can all live together as friends.”

The officials were impressed with the way Maha Surasak talked to the prisoners. Seeing that his way of presenting the Dhamma was so right for them and so skillful, the warders were amazed. One of them exclaimed, “Maha! It is good! Ever since you have been coming to teach here, I have no longer had to hit the prisoners with my cane.” Maha Surasak, who valued rationality, discipline, and kindness, addressed the prison officers. “If you harbor negative feelings toward the prisoners and expect them, at the same time, to behave positively, you are being illogical. If you want the atmo-

sphere in the prison to be calm, you have to create the ground of friendliness.” Ajan Surasak told the warders, “It is my principle to bring good will to the prisoners, not oppression. Yes, they have done something wrong, but do not look down on them. Their lives are already under great pressure. If we follow the Buddha’s teachings, we will live together in peace and harmony.”

From the vantage point of old age, Luang Ta Chi comments, “When monks experience prison they gain a better understanding of life.”



## Practicing Dhamma to the Utmost

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Lyndon B. Johnson became president of the United States and intensified the war in Vietnam. In Thailand, on December 8, two weeks after Kennedy was killed, Field Marshall Sarit died from cirrhosis of the liver. Field Marshall Thanom succeeded Sarit as prime minister, and the country continued to be ruled under a dictatorship.

In the mid-1960s the military government and the Sangha authorities in Bangkok decided that monks should take part in rural development to help combat the threat of communism. In an effort to win over villagers, the government attempted to make the monks' roles more relevant to the daily lives and problems of rural people by allowing monks to perform tasks that would contribute to community development. Ironically, officials had previously condemned Ajan Surasak and other socially engaged monks who were involved with their local communities as communists. Now the government declared them to be useful.

Four years after his incarceration, Maha Surasak was found innocent of the charge that had been held against him. He was released in 1964. By then he was thirty-nine years old. His teacher, Venerable Phimontham, arrested in 1962, was kept in prison until August 1966. The elder monk was then sixty-three years old.

Right after he became free, Maha Surasak traveled to Chonburi province to see his spiritual teacher. Ajan Phatthanta

Assapha Thera is the Burmese master who teaches vipassana meditation at his Wiwekasom center (Viveka Ashram, “The Hermitage of Complete Solitude”). Luang Ta Chi calls his teacher Ajan Assapha. Under the guidance of his Burmese master, Maha Surasak spent over six months in meditation practice. He talked to no one except his spiritual teacher. Ajan Assapha trained his pupil hard and constantly checked his progress in meditation. The Burmese master interviewed him at least once a day, probing the Thai monk’s mind states. Whenever any problems came up, Maha Surasak always consulted his teacher for guidance. Ajan Assapha is well versed in Pali texts as well as skilled in meditation practice. Maha Surasak progressed smoothly in the right direction. He cultivated mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom according to the Maha Satipatthana text (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness).

During this solitary retreat Maha Surasak lived an ascetic life. “I slept only a few hours at night and ate only one meal a day. I went on almsround for food. While walking on almsround I maintained mindfulness. I returned alone to my kuti to eat from my almsbowl. I ate little, slept little, spoke very little, and meditated with increasing effort.” A kuti is the small, hut-like living quarters of a monk, or a room assigned to a monk in a one-storey building.

For six months Maha Surasak maintained the Five Controlling Faculties (*indriya*) in equilibrium. These are important Dhamma constituents in the practice: faith (*saddha*), effort (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*panna*). According to Phra Dhammapitaka, when our Five Controlling Faculties are working in equilibrium,

our practice of Dhamma and our work in the mundane world will advance steadily and smoothly toward success. Saddha is an essential quality; it brings strength. Faith points out directions to the faculty of *panna*, urging it to anchor wisdom to the object and to provide wisdom with strength. Viriya is diligence. Samadhi is a state of mind that is solid and tranquil. Samadhi without effort slows things down. Working as a team, viriya pushes forward and samadhi gives effort a steady hand. Effort and samadhi support each other to maintain balance. All this takes place under the watchful eyes of mindfulness.

Pleased with his student's progress, Ajan Assapha began to train Surasak to be a vipassana teacher. From the Burmese master Maha Surasak learned ingenious methods to deal with a crisis or critical situation that allowed a yogi to overcome his problems gradually and move on unhindered. Then the Burmese master assigned him the task of training the monks, nuns, novices, and laypeople who came to practice at the hermitage. As a meditation teacher, Maha Surasak was able to help the yogis day and night, whenever their minds got stuck, so that they could progress in their practice.



## Meditation Teacher and Preacher

In 1966 Ajan Assapha, the Burmese master in Chonburi, received a request from the meditation center of Wat Khao Kaeo (Crystal Hill Monastery) in Nakhon Sawan province to send a meditation teacher to the wat. Ajan Inthawangsa Thera, the Burmese master who had been teaching at the Wat Khao Kaeo meditation center, had returned to Burma. Ajan Hongthong, a Thai monk, arrived to succeed Ajan Inthawangsa as the teacher of meditation. Soon after, Ajan Hongthong, too, left his post. He disrobed in order to marry. Ajan Assapha then sent Maha Surasak to Nakhon Sawan to teach vipassana meditation.

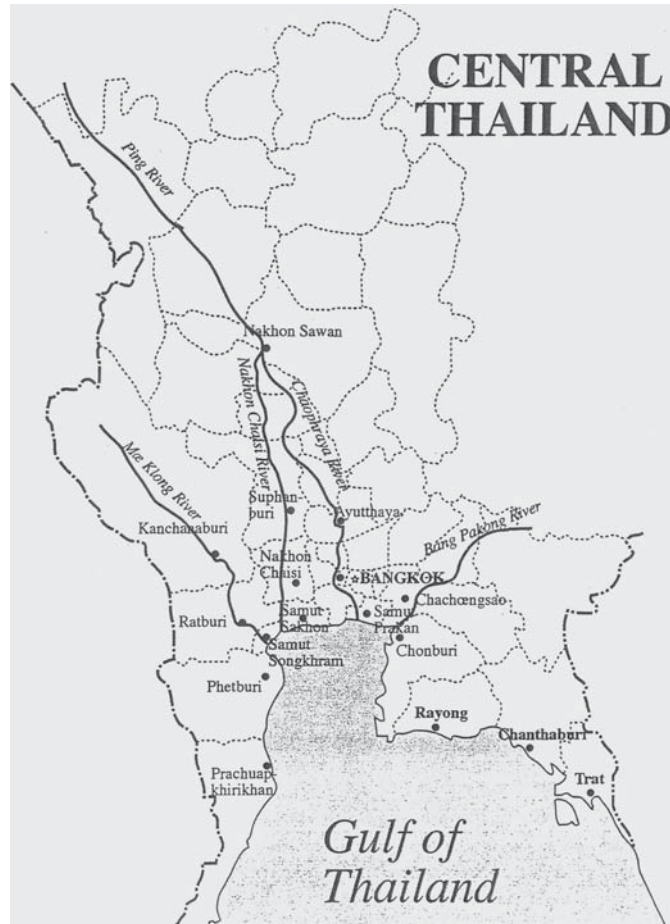


*Monks residence at Wat Khao Kaeo.*



From Chonburi province Maha Surasak traveled to Nakhon Sawan, the gateway to the northern region of Thailand. Both provinces were known as “Muang Nakleng.” Luang Ta Chi recalls, “Just as in Chonburi, there were many *nakleng* in Nakhon Sawan.” The Thai word *nakleng* has no equivalent in English. The word can be used as an adjective or a noun. A *nakleng* is a strong, fearless man. Traditionally, a *nakleng* could be good or bad. Villagers looked up to good *nakleng* to protect them from bad *nakleng* and relied on them to pursue bandits. A bad *nakleng* was able to steal water buffaloes and get away with it. Some *nakleng* became village headmen.

Wat Khao Kaeo is an old monastery, located in the foothills in Phayuha Kiri district. The monastic compound was large, covering approximately eighty acres of land. A private school belonging to the wat occupies a site on the premises. Every academic year several hundred monks and novices from other monasteries come to study at the school. When Maha Surasak arrived, some local people speculated that he would soon disrobe just like Ajan Hongthong. Ajan Surasak did not know anyone. After a conference with the abbot, Venerable Father Kan, Maha Surasak became the abbot’s disciple.



*Central Thailand showing  
Chonburi and Nakhon Sawan.*

Venerable Father Kan was a disciple of Ajan Doem Buddhasaro (1861-1951), abbot of Wat Nong Pho, one of the most revered *keji ajan* in Nakhon Sawan. *Keji ajan* is a Thai term that indicates a meditation monk who has sacred powers. Amulets that were blessed or sacralized by Ajan Kan were believed to have protective potency or miraculous

powers. The keji ajan addressed the needs of common people. Maha Surasak observed that there was a steady stream of people, all day long, coming to see the abbot. They came from all quarters to seek Ajan Kan's help when they fell ill or were injured. In addition to those suffering physical ills, Ajan Kan gave amulets he had blessed to the worried or the fearful for protection. Both young and old asked Venerable Father to blow on their heads, an ancient form of blessing usually performed by a meditation monk or an old abbot. Like his teacher Venerable Father Doem, Ajan Kan was skilled in making sacred knives. Some people also brought various kinds of knives for Ajan Kan to bless, which he did by chanting gathas into the objects. The laypeople then returned home with these sacred objects, fortified in the belief that the items that Ajan Kan had blessed had the power to protect them from bad spirits and any other harm.

Local people came to Wat Khao Kaeo mainly to see Ajan Kan. Things began to change after Ajan Surasak became the meditation teacher there. His preaching skills drew large numbers of people in Phayuha district to Wat Khao Kaeo. People who had never been known to go to the wat came out to hear the way Maha Surasak preached. Increasing numbers of people also came to practice meditation under the guidance of Ajan Maha Surasak. There was not enough space to enable people to sit down to hear the sermons. In addition, more meditation cells had to be built to accommodate the large number of yogis who wished to stay at the wat. Both monastics and layfolk took part in the construction of new quarters. Venerable Father Kan was very supportive of Ajan Surasak's work.

Even Venerable Dhammakhunaphon, sangha chief of the Phayuha district, was impressed with Maha Surasak's

ability to draw a crowd. Seeing that those who were least likely to come to the wat or disliked listening to sermons now came regularly, the sangha chief told Ajan Surasak, “Maha! I am a native of Phayuha. I have attained the highest Pali degree. I have been awarded a royal ecclesiastical title. But I am unable to persuade the vendors in the market to come to listen to the sermons at the wat. You have been here only a few years, yet you are capable of convincing ordinary folk to come to the wat. I admire your efforts and rejoice in your accomplishments. You have shown many people the way to heaven.”

In the early 1960s the Takli district of Nakhon Sawan became the site of an American air base. American planes took off to bomb North Vietnam from the Takli airfield, 255 kilometers due north of Bangkok. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August of 1964, additional U.S. aircraft were based in Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat). Other military contingents, operating out of Nakhon Phanom, struck at south-eastern Laos, a region believed to be full of followers of Ho Chi Minh. The presence of U.S. aircraft had a great impact on the towns and villages and on the lives of local people, socially, economically, and culturally. By 1972 there were more bars than temples in Takli district. The total number of nightclubs in the district of Takli was forty-six, whereas temples and monasteries there numbered forty-four.

In Nakhon Sawan, Ajan Surasak cooperated with provincial officials in their efforts to win the hearts and minds of local people. The monk accompanied the officials on routine visits to villages all over the province. Ajan Surasak traveled with either a district officer or an assistant district officer. His preaching skills drew huge crowds of people. Ajan Surasak's brother tells us, “No matter where he went,

whenever Ajan Surasak gave a Dhamma talk, his sermon put smiles on the faces of layfolk. Once the monk finished speaking and the government officials got up to address the crowd, the villagers stopped smiling. One by one they left the pavilion. Local people were unwilling to listen to the officials' speeches. That's why the officials of the province or district asked the monk to accompany them everywhere they went, whether to the villages, subdistricts or district towns. They knew that people would come out if they saw the monk."

Ajan Surasak had a knack for speaking directly to ordinary people. He was able to explain the wisdom of applying the Buddha's teachings in an increasingly modernizing society. This was at a time when Thailand was still under the rule of an extremely authoritarian regime. A whole generation of young people was struggling with uncertainty and looking for direction. As his reputation as a great preacher spread far and wide, more and more invitations for him to preach arrived at Wat Khao Kaeo, invitations arriving almost daily. There were often ceremonies outside the monastery at which Ajan Surasak was invited to teach Dhamma. These ceremonies were connected with stages of the life cycle such as birthdays, the shaving of the topknot, ordinations, marriages, and funerals. Sometimes Ajan Surasak gave Dhamma teachings at three different locations in a single day. He seldom had any time to himself. Ajan Surasak was either training layfolk in meditation or traveling around the province teaching Dhamma.

As Luang Ta Chi recalls, "There were times when I came down with a fever and had to rest. One day, when I was stricken with fever, a layman came to my kuti and begged me to teach. He said hundreds of people had already come to the wat, eager to hear my sermon. I got up slowly and dragged

myself out to the preaching pavilion. All the while that I was sitting on the Dhamma seat and expounding the Buddha's teachings, I felt as if I was drinking medicine. The fever simply disappeared. It was incredible." This incident serves as an example of Ajan Surasak's powers of endurance and great devotion to the Dhamma.

Luang Ta Chi continues, "I had a high fever on another occasion and was sound asleep in my kuti. There was a festival of merit making going on at Wat Tai. Some time before the day of the festival people began hearing that Ajan Surasak was scheduled to preach at the festival. Thousands of people, young and old, men as well as women, showed up at Wat Tai, not knowing that the preacher was too ill to come." One of Ajan Surasak's lay disciples, a doctor, was with the ajan at this time. Not wishing to let down all the people who esteemed and admired the monk so greatly, the doctor came up with a solution. He gave his beloved ajan an injection. "I had no idea what kind of medicine he gave me," Luang Ta Chi reports, "but within thirty minutes I regained my energy. I went to the festival and preached for two or three hours from the Dhamma seat."

Ajan Surasak enjoys working hard. His work is his life. In his teachings he often reiterates, "Life is worthwhile when you are doing meaningful work."

After spending a few years at Wat Khao Kaeo, his Burmese teacher, Ajan Assapha, asked Maha Surasak to return to Wiwekasom. Maha Surasak went back to Chonburi and resumed his duties as meditation teacher at Wiwekasom. A large number of monks, nuns (*mae chi*), novices, and laypeople came to Wiwekasom to practice vipassana meditation under the guidance of Ajan Surasak. Throughout any given year, the number of yogis who came to Wiwekasom numbered in



the thousands. Some stayed for seven or fifteen days. Others stayed for several months. Monks and novices spent the entire three months of the rains retreat at Wiwekasom in order to practice meditation. Luang Ta Chi tells us, “The teaching of meditation is very interesting work. You get to know people from all walks of life. Each person has his own distinctive habits. The teacher inevitably learns all about an individual’s character and personality as these emerge in the course of his meditation practice.”



*Phramaha Surasak  
Jivanando,  
47 years old.*

In addition to training yogis in meditation, Ajan Surasak also accepted invitations to give Dhamma teachings in other districts and many villages throughout Chonburi province. For the next two years Ajan Surasak served as meditation teacher as well as preacher at Wiwekasom.

About this time Venerable Father Sinuan, abbot of Wat Thungsathit in Phra Khanong district, then on the outskirts of Bangkok, wished to invite a meditation teacher to reside permanently at his monastery. Ajan Sinuan went to Wat Mahathat to consult with Venerable Phimontham and Venerable Chodok. In 1970 the senior monks gave permission to Ajan Surasak to move to Wat Thungsathit.

Venerable Father Sinuan was well known for his meditation practice and his supernormal powers. Every day, streams of people with all kinds of problems came to see the abbot. He was busy receiving visitors from morning until night. These visitors included national politicians, military men, police officers, college students, schoolboys and girls, businessmen, and men and women living from hand to mouth on

the streetall came to see Ajan Sinuan to ask him for advice, for his blessings, and for the amulets that they believed had the power to confer protection and prosperity.

From the first day that he moved into Wat Thungsathit, Ajan Surasak's main priority was to teach vipassana meditation to the laypeople who came to the monastery. He considered delivering sermons on holy days or training young monks and novices to be secondary tasks. In less than a year, Venerable Father Sinuan realized that Ajan Surasak was a Jack-



of-all-trades, skilled in delivering sermons, in administrative work, and in teaching and training monks and novices. Consequently, Venerable Father Sinuan began to assign Ajan Surasak more and more responsibilities. His workload included the training of young monks, novices, and temple boys to adhere to the monastic rules and regulations; maintaining orderliness and cleanliness; and keeping the wat buildings in good repair and the trees in the wat compound healthy. From the time that Ajan Surasak became a resident teacher at Wat Thungsathit in 1970, people who came to the monastery began noticing the improved appearance of the wat compound. "How neat, clean, and orderly things are," as Luang Ta Chi has put it.

In a society that is comprised of people from various backgrounds with diverse needs, many kinds of monks are needed to serve those spiritual needs. Keji ajans who possessed supernormal or healing powers, like Venerable Father Kan and Venerable Father Sinuan, were much respected by those who believed in the power of spirits. Keji ajans helped people cope with evil spirits, manage their fears, and assuage their anxieties. Having served under two abbots who were keji ajans, Luang Ta Chi observed, "Monks who are keji ajans help people psychologically. Monks who are preachers help people to live their lives morally. People who are suffering misfortune come to see the keji ajan. People who want to hear Dhamma teaching come to see the preacher."

Ajan Surasak had been a teacher at Wat Thungsathit in Bangkok at a time when the majority of people were increasingly fed up with the dictatorship. There had been no elections in the country since 1957. In October 1973 massive demonstrations were held with anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000 people gathering in the heart of Bangkok to de-

mand the restoration of the constitution. These included university students, technical school students, secondary school students, and working members of the middle class. These huge demonstrations led to clashes with the police. The military chiefs refused to send their troops against the demonstrations. The students were fortunate in gaining the support of the king. On October 14, 1973, Thanom and his deputy, Prapat, were forced to resign and left the country to take up exile abroad. Dr. Sanya Dharmasakdi, who had been rector of Thammasat University and was president of the Privy Council, was appointed Prime Minister. Professor Sanya had long been a supporter of Ajan Buddhadasa's work. During the 1980s many Western Buddhists came to know Dr. Sanya as President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Bangkok.



## Preaching to Drunks

In the upcountry, festivals usually take place in a wat compound, and during these festivals, fights often break out between people who get drunk. Even when there is no festival, many Thai men enjoy getting together to drink. To this day, Buddhist monks use the same homiletic verses to preach about the effects of drinking upon otherwise decent men.

Having drunk the first glass, a man remembers what is right or wrong.

He can still discuss the Dhamma as well as worldly matters.

After the second glass, a quiet man becomes talkative.

After the third glass, he is not aware that his sarong has fallen off.

After the fourth glass, he loses his fear.

After the fifth glass, he is not embarrassed by his behavior.

After the sixth glass, his words are incomprehensible.

After the seventh glass, he begins to walk on all fours like an animal.

After the eighth glass, he sees an elephant and mistakes it for a pig.

After the ninth glass, he throws up and mingles with the dogs, eating the food he vomits.

After the tenth glass, he can no longer walk and falls asleep on the footpath.

The details of the sermon varied according to the circumstances, but many preachers gave graphic warning. Being a poet himself, Ajan Surasak recognized the importance of poetry in our lives. Ajan Surasak came up with his own humorous poem to capture the attention of drunks and lure them to listen to his Dhamma talks. When Ajan Surasak served as meditation teacher at Wiwekasom he frequently went to the provincial town of Chonburi to give Dhamma teachings. On one occasion he preached at the market, a place where drunken men often congregated. The drunks perked up when they heard the monk talking about the benefits of drinking:

If you drink liquor with chicken, your path to heaven will quicken.

If you drink liquor with duck, your path to stream-entry is your good luck.

If you drink liquor with pig meat, nibbana will be your treat.

But drink liquor only, farewell; you'll be caned by the King of Hell.

Note that Thai Buddhists are generally familiar with the term “stream-entry,” or *sotapanna* in Pali, the first level of enlightenment. It is believed that a householder who practices meditation seriously can attain stream-entry. Nibbana (nirvana in Sanskrit), or liberation from all greed, hatred, and delusion, is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice.





## The Origin of Wat Thai Washington, D.C.



*Wat Thai Washington, D.C. at Wayne Avenue, 1974*

Let us now return to Novice Sobin, who was living at Wat Mahathat at the same time that Maha Surasak was studying there. In 1949 Sobin was the first novice to undertake the intensive meditation retreat at Wat Mahathat in Bangkok. A year later, in 1950, when he reached the age of twenty, Novice Sobin took higher ordination as a monk. He was given the monastic name Sopako. Ajan Maha Sobin attained the highest level of Pali studies as well as becoming a skilled

practitioner in vipassana meditation. Although he received training from many, his principal teacher was Venerable Bhavanaphiram Thera, who introduced him to a meticulous, step-by-step method for developing mindfulness. When he was twenty-four years old, Ajan Sobin began teaching insight meditation and Abhidhamma. He taught for many years at Wat Mahathat and other meditation centers in Thailand.

When the first Thai temple was established in the United States, the Thai Sangha Council appointed Ajan Sobin to become the abbot of the wat. The monastery is called Wat Thai Los Angeles, and it is located in Los Angeles, California. From 1972 on, Ajan Sobin taught both meditation and Pali at the Los Angeles monastery.

In 1971, a group of Thai people living in Washington, D.C. got together to establish a community of Thai Buddhists called “The Buddhist Association in Washington, D.C.” A few years later, the committee voted to establish a wat and invited monks from Thailand to reside there. With a budget of \$3,744, the committee rented a house at 705 Wayne Avenue in Silver Spring, Maryland. They signed the lease for a year. The rent was \$350 per month. The president of the Buddhist Association was an army major-general named Wichian Buranasiri. At the time the only other Thai monastery in the United States was Wat Thai Los Angeles.

Once the house for the new wat was ready, the president of the association asked Ajan Sobin, abbot of Wat Thai, Los Angeles, to write a letter to Venerable Dhammakosachan (Chop Anuchari) at Wat Mahathat in Bangkok and request that the sangha official send some Thai monks to reside at the newly established wat in Washington. Venerable Dhammakosachan selected two monks from Wat Mahathat: Venerable Teacher Phibun Phothaphirat and Phra Palad

Worasak Thipankaro.

The two monks arrived in Washington, D.C. on July 4, 1974. Although in the American calendar, this was recognized as Independence Day, according to the Thai Buddhist calendar, it was Asalaha Bucha Day, an auspicious day in Thai Buddhism. Asalaha Bucha, celebrated on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month, commemorates the Buddha's first disciples. The Thai community was overjoyed to see the Thai monks and to receive blessings from them on this holy day. From that day on, Thai people have considered Asalaha Bucha Day 1974 to be the birthday of Wat Thai Washington, D.C.

In October 1974 Ajan Worasak returned to Thailand because of poor health. The committee of the Buddhist Association then asked Ajan Sobin to send one of the monks in Los Angeles to replace Ajan Worasak. Ajan Sobin asked Phra Maha Kliang Techawaro to go to Washington to help Ajan Phibun in his work. In January 1975 Ajan Phibun went back to Thailand for a visit. As it turned out, he was unable to return to Washington. The committee of the Buddhist Association consulted with Ajan Sobin, who was the most senior monk in America at the time. Ajan Sobin then wrote a letter to Wat Thungsathit in Bangkok to invite Phra Maha Surasak to become abbot of Wat Thai Washington. Maha Surasak arrived in Washington on February 11, 1975. He turned fifty years old in June of that year. He has been abbot of Wat Thai ever since.





*Wat Thai Washington, D.C.  
at Georgia Avenue, 1980*

Under the abbotship of Luang Ta Chi, Wat Thai has moved a few times. In the early 1980s the committee finally found the most suitable location at 13440 Layhill Road in Silver Spring, Maryland. The Buddhist Association bought the building and the land surrounding it, and the site has been the permanent location of Wat Thai Washington, D.C. ever since.

As abbot of the second Thai temple ever to be created in the United States, Luang Ta Chi became known as a skilled preacher, meditation teacher, and prolific writer. His writings include Dhamma novels, short stories, and some poetry.



## The Most Influential Teachers



*Wat Thai Washington, D.C. today.*

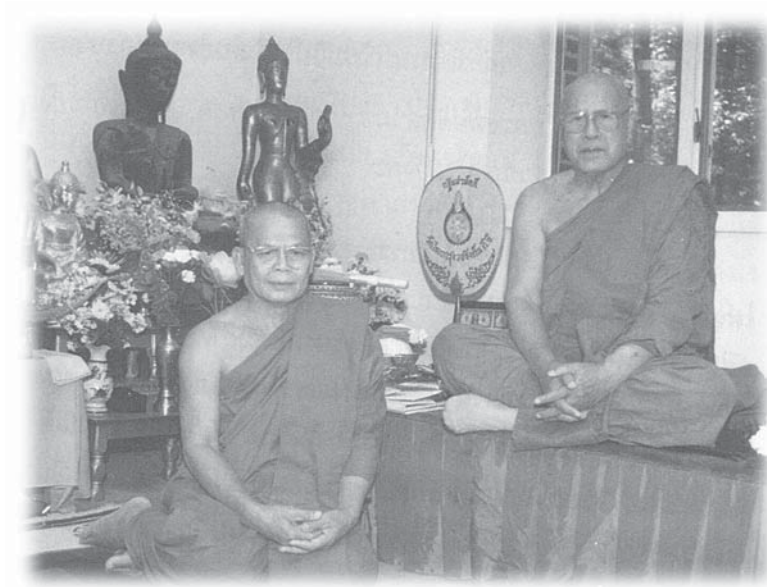
Long before coming to the United States, Luang Ta Chi identified three elder monks as those who have had the most influence on him. These teachers were Ajan Phimontham (1903-89), Ajan Buddhadasa (1906-93), and Ajan Panyanantha (b. 1911). It was while he was a resident monk at Wat Mahathat in Bangkok, from 1946 to 1951, that Maha Surasak met both Ajan Panyanantha and Ajan Buddhadasa. Although he did not study under these two preachers, Maha Surasak was profoundly influenced by their exemplary methods of teaching. Luang Ta Chi recalls, “During the years 1947 to 1950, Venerable Father Panyanantha began his first

round of public teachings. I went to hear his Dhamma talks and was deeply impressed by his boldness. While in Bangkok, I also went to hear Venerable Father Buddhadasā's Dhamma talks at the Buddhist Association and at Chulalongkorn University. From then on, their ways of teaching have guided me in my own teaching of Dhamma to other people. Although I have not yet gained much spiritual perfection (parami), I have benefited greatly from their guidance."

Maha Surasak felt especially close to Phra Phimontham, the abbot of Wat Mahathat in which the young monk had been living. Years after he was released from prison, Venerable Phimontham was awarded the honorific title of Somdet Phutthachan. In his recollections, Luang Ta Chi refers to his mentor by this latest of his ecclesiastical titles. "Venerable Father Somdet Phutthachan was my teacher. Due to his kindness, I was allowed to live at Wat Mahathat." From the abbot Maha Surasak learned Buddhist liturgy, liturgical customs and traditions, monastic law, daily religious rituals, including how to do the proper prostration, and Wat Mahathat's chanting style. Maha Surasak was inspired by Somdet Phutthachan's wisdom: "I learned much from him. As a monk, Venerable Father had the utmost patience. No matter who hated him, condemned him, or criticized him, Venerable Father did not hate, condemn, or criticize in return. I greatly respected Venerable Father. He never took revenge. He was the only senior monk who was accused of many offenses, but he did not take issue with his accusers. He could withstand their accusations. His goodness was self-evident. He taught me not to be swayed by criticism."

When speaking to the young monks who were studying at the Buddhist University in Bangkok, Ajan Panyanantha told them to initiate meaningful work. "After graduation we





*Luang Ta Chi & Ajan Panyananta*

should set out to work. Pariyatti monks often complain that nobody assigns us any work, and we are not told what to do. Why must we wait for the senior monks to give us instructions? Why wait for work to be assigned to us? This is a flaw in today's monks' thinking - that we must have an order before we can get to work. Look around. There are lots of things that need to be done. In fact, the amount of work is overwhelming. The problem is that there are not enough monks to tackle all this work. . . . We don't have to wait for anybody's orders. We monks take orders directly from the Buddha."

In those days government as well as sangha officials tended to get promotions on the basis of their various connections. Venerable Phimontham established the work ethic among his disciples. Luang Ta Chi recalls, "Venerable Teacher reiterated that administrative monks tend to use their

connections with senior monks to climb the ecclesiastical ladder. We must never do that. We must rely on our own capabilities instead of connections. I was really impressed by what he said.” Ajan Phimontham encouraged the young monk to devote his energy to work and to use work as a means to develop and grow.

Luang Ta Chi is deeply inspired by Ajan Buddhadasa’s writings. Despite the fact that many people in modern society work just enough to get by, a tendency that has become the norm, the abbot often emphasizes that we can develop our human potential through our work if we put our hearts and minds fully into what we are doing. In the following poem, Ajan Buddhadasa states explicitly that work itself is essential to spiritual attainment.

## **Work**

*Please, never doubt that work holds the highest honor  
In revealing the true value of human life.*

*If enjoyed, too, it makes the heart blossom.  
Before long, through work, one will understand  
Dhamma profoundly.*

*Work itself is the very practice of Dhamma.  
All kinds of work, done as practice, are truly valuable.  
Just as a sharpshooter can bag a sackful of birds  
with a single shot, In devotion  
to work, the worker gains much wisdom.*

In 1932 Ajan Buddhadasa established Suan Mokkhabalarama (The Garden of the Power of Liberation) in his home



town Chaiya in Surathani province, southern Thailand. In working to integrate textual study and meditation practice, Ajan Buddhadasa regarded the very wilderness in which he lived and observed ascetic practices as his teacher. Respect for the instructional value of the natural world was at the forefront of Ajan Buddhadasa's teachings. He drew on nature to reveal the interconnectedness of all life forms. In his writings, Ajan Buddhadasa boldly articulated the need for dhammic socialism, envi-



*Ajan Buddhadasa*

sioned as a network of communities committed to ecological and moral principles and conceived as an alternative to the dehumanizing power of corporate capitalism, global uniformity, and a media-induced obsession with sex and violence.

Santikaro, who established "Liberation Park" in America's Midwest, wrote that Ajan Buddhadasa "has produced the largest and most innovative body of work of any bhikkhu in recent Thai history. He has been a pioneer in the application of Buddha-Dhamma to the realities of the modern world during the recent decades of rampant modernization and economic growth and has forthrightly criticized the immorality and selfishness of many modern social structures. Further, he has been Thailand's most vocal proponent of open-mindedness toward other religions."





## Luang Ta Chi as a Writer



From the time he first came to the United States to serve as abbot of a Thai temple, Luang Ta Chi began to write regularly. He was self-educated. In his younger days, his favorite Thai writers were Sri Burapha and Kulap Saipradit. Living in the United States, Luang Ta Chi reads whatever is available, whatever he can find. He has always found something of value in the printed page. Talking to a Westerner or reading a book in English often gives the Buddhist abbot ideas for his short stories or a new slant on an old idea. Luang Ta Chi explains how he developed his style of writing. “I gain knowledge from my random readings. I use simple words, not formal written language or highly idiomatic expressions, to make my writing more accessible to ordinary readers. They do not have to think too much. I spare the readers this headache. I figured out on my own how to write simply. And it works. It is like eating a deli-

cious meal cooked by a chef. Many readers have written to ask for more copies of my books to give to their friends.”

What with his busy schedule as an abbot, many of his lay followers have wondered how Luang Ta Chi manages to find time to write. The abbot tells us that he sleeps about four or five hours every night. Normally he goes to bed around 10:30 p.m. He wakes up around 3:00 a.m. The early hours are spent in reading or writing, and walking and sitting meditation.

The abbot is prolific. He writes under the pen name “Luang Ta Chi,” using storytelling as a vehicle for promulgating the Dhamma. Luang Ta Chi has a way with words. In his writings the abbot has turned to poetry, novels, and short stories to impart Dhamma to people who have grown up in modern society. Using humor and simple language, Luang Ta Chi is able to show his readers how to apply the Buddha’s teachings to everyday life.

The short stories that he has written have appeared in the monthly magazine *Saeng Dhamma* (Light of Dhamma),





published by Wat Thai Washington, Luang Ta Chi usually writes by hand on loose sheets of paper. In the early years of his abbotship at Wat Thai, a resident monk named Maha Kliang typed up the work for him. The first story to appear in the magazine was “Voice of Dhamma from Wat Thai.” The second story was “Voice of Dhamma from Luang Ta Chi.”

The simplicity of the abbot’s prose style makes the Buddha’s teachings accessible to the average Thai Buddhist. Luang Ta Chi has a knack for coming up with interesting, intriguing and often catchy titles for his stories. His first catchy title got him in trouble, however. “When I first became an abbot in America, I wrote a story called ‘People are Dogs; Dogs are Gods.’ The readers got overly excited. Some people complained, what kind of monk is this? Why is he cursing? They came to see me, and I explained how people became dogs and how dogs became gods. I kept on writing stories. Later on they stopped criticizing me.”

Among the Dhammic novels that have been published and distributed as gifts of Dhamma are: *The Force of Karma*, *The Power of Revenge*, *The Lady Who Loved Dhamma*, *Indra in the Human Realm*, *A Wealthy Man Puts a Monk to the Test*, *A Disciple Betrayed His Teacher*, and *The Grateful Disciples*. Luang Ta Chi tells us that “The main character in *The Lady Who Loved Dhamma* is Visakha. I laced her story with Dhamma teachings. The novel has appealed to a large number of people, most of whom are women. The first printing sold out, but we did not have the funding to reprint.” It is well known among Thai Buddhists that Visakha was the Buddha’s chief patroness. She was seven years old when she met the Buddha, who had just arrived in the city of Bhaddiya.



The Buddha taught the Dhamma to Visakha and her five hundred maids. At the end of the discourse all of them attained to stream-entry.

To date Luang Ta Chi has written 238 short stories. These stories bring some aspect of the Dhamma to life in way that speaks to men, women, and children in contemporary society. Each story is self-contained and does not take long to read. However, the plays on words in his titles do not always translate well into English.

Among the short stories he has written, many with catchy or intriguing titles, are: Food for the Heart; Going to Pieces; Drunk on Love–Drunk on Liquor; Belief in the Stars; A Poisonous Environment; Illness of the Body–Illness of the Heart; Incantations to Ward Off Ghosts; Incantations to Subdue Ghosts; Shelter from Heat; The Power of Thoughts; The Benefits of Samadhi; The Character of a Worm; Why Bother Going to the Temple?; Worthless Ones; Transcending the World; The Deceitful One; A Castle in Hell; Heavenly Hut;

The Enemy Within; Timeless Dhamma; A Cancerous Mood;  
One Who Fooled the World; The Demon King; Love One-  
self; Love Dhamma; Love Life; A Crow Teaches Dhamma;  
Society without Sila-Dhamma; Four-Faced Brahma; The Ladle  
Does Not Taste the Soup; A Pressing Matter; Those without  
Dhamma; Contentment; The Demon's Snare; Fear of Death;  
Giving and Receiving Smiles; A New Life; A Graybeard; A  
Good Man Slipped in the End; True Men; Drunken Men;  
Meritorious Ones; Well-Disciplined Ones; One's Personal  
Core; Those with Dhamma; Not Being Negligent; Give and  
Take; Clear Water-Clean Mind; Beloved Friend; A Monk's  
Warning; Self-Reliance; Looking at Oneself; Know Good  
from Bad; A Ruse to Overcome Sleepiness; Profiting from  
Experience; The Heart's Refuge; The Qualities of Life; Light  
of Wisdom; Win-Lose; Spiritual Friendship; Knaves Awarded  
Rank; What Do We Gain from Dhamma?; Rich but Ignor-  
ant; Rusty Heart; An Ingrate; Amulets Overshadow the Truth;  
A Blind Heart; Do Good While There's Time; Worldly  
Knowledge; Dhammic Wisdom; Masked Era; Society in  
Chaos; The Crisis of Faith; The Problems of Society;  
Defilement Rules the World; Looking at Oneself; Dare to  
Do Evil-Fear to Do Good; Bad Men Become Ghosts-Good  
Men Become Monks; Wipe Away Misfortune with Dhamma;  
and It Is Difficult to Train Oneself.





## For Future Generations of Buddhists

While Luang Ta Chi has been living abroad, his hometown, Khamcha-ee, has become a district, and Mukdahan district has become a province in 1982. Although Luang Ta Chi has served as abbot in the United States for three decades, he has never forgotten his natal village. Luang Ta Chi has channeled the donations he has received to the educational foundations that he has established for school children, young monks, and novices in the northeast. The first of these, the Phra Maha Surasak Chiwanantho Foundation, provides for the education of children who are studying at the School of Ban Phon Ngam Village. Every year the enrollment of students in his natal village school is between seven hundred and eight hundred. The second foundation provides financial support to students at the School of Khamcha-ee Phithayakhom in Khamcha-ee. The third, the Maha Chulalongkorn University Foundation, at Wat Mahathat in Bangkok, supports young monks who study at this Buddhist university. The fourth, the Dhammarat Foundation, provides financial support for young monks and novices in their studies at the monastic school of Wat Sommanat in Udonthani province. The fifth foundation supports the monastic School of Wat Dong Mafai in Sakon Nakhon province.

Luang Ta Chi frequently receives letters from boys and girls in Khamcha-ee who write to him with gratitude and affection. In their letters the young students tell Luang Ta Chi about their school activities, the subjects they enjoy, the



teachers they like, things that happen in their lives, and their aspirations. In the late 1930s, when Luang Ta Chi was a student at the village school, children had no textbooks. From the funding provided by Luang Ta Chi, the school now has computers, and the children are learning the new technology.

The villages of Khamcha-ee are no longer isolated. In 1970, during the height of the Vietnam War, road length in Thailand totaled only 5,891 kilometers. By 1975, when Luang Ta Chi left Thailand to become abbot of Wat Thai, D.C. in the United States, the total length of roads in Thailand came to 7,439 kilometers. Two decades later, in 1985, total road length had increased to 27,595 kilometers. The dense forests of Khamcha-ee have mostly disappeared. Today when travelers take a trip by paved road from Bangkok to Mukdahan



province and Khamcha-ee district, they will see numerous motor vehicles, mainly motorcycles, and television antennas in every village they pass.

Luang Ta Chi believes that children should be trained to practice meditation when they are quite young. From his experience as a meditation teacher, he informs us that “It is easy to teach children to meditate. Children do not have a lot on their minds, and they have limited experience. They are able to concentrate their minds quickly. My experience has revealed that it is easier to teach children than it is to teach adults, including novices and monks. It is easier to teach village folk than teach monks or novices. It is easier to train novices than train monks. The more knowledgeable the monk is, the harder it is to teach him meditation. The older the monk, the harder he is to teach.”

From his perspective, as he approaches the age of eighty, Luang Ta Chi is convinced that the state religious education system should be reformed to make it more relevant to modern society. In his opinion, those who write textbooks should have the following qualities:

1. An understanding of the problems of life;
2. Knowledge of how to use Dhamma to solve problems;
3. An ability to explain things in ordinary language; and
4. A deep understanding of Dhamma.





## Awards Received



During the last decade of the twentieth century, when Luang Ta Chi was sixty-nine, he began to receive increasing public recognition in Thailand.

- **In 1994** *Luang Ta Chi received the Sema Dhammachakra award from the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education for his outstanding work in propagating the Buddha's teachings abroad.*

- **In 1995** *Luang Ta Chi received the Mahidol Waranuson plaque, awarded by the Social Welfare Institute of Thailand.*

- **In 1996** *Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University conferred on Luang Ta Chi an Honorary Doctorate of Buddhist Education.*

- **In 1999** *King Bhumibol bestowed the ecclesiastical title of Phra Withet-Dhammarangsi (Ray of Dhamma Abroad) upon Luang Ta Chi. By then the abbot was seventy-five years old.*



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## Illustration credits

The photograph of buffalo cart and the maps are from Professort David K. Wyatt.

Photographs of the villagers in Khamcha-ee district were taken by Professor A. Thomas Kirsch. (1930-1999).

The following photographs, originally published in *Mukdahan: Muang Muk Mekong*, were taken by Surin Muksi. Permission has been granted by Sujit Wongthes, the author of the book.

Monks on almsround at Wat Phrathat Phanom, 1995.

Wat Phrathat Phanom today.

Wat Phrathat Phanom in the 1950s.

Almsround in the village.

Phu Thai healing ceremony in Mukdahan.



# Human Nature

## THOSE WHO FEAR THE DEATH

***Sabbe tasanti dandhassa  
Sabbe bāyanti maccuno  
Attanam upaman katvā  
Na haney ya na ghātaye***

*All living creatures are afraid of punishment.  
All living creatures are afraid of death.  
Make an example of yourself  
and avoid killing others and beings killed.*

Fear of punishment is a normal instinct of all living creatures, be they human or non-human. When someone has committed an unlawful act, there is an immediate attempt to flee into the forest, to another town, to go into hiding or even abroad. Upon capture, there is the hiring of the best lawyer one can afford for the defense. This is the normal instinctive reaction to fear of punishment.

Fear of death is another common instinct of all living creatures. No one wants to die. We avoid harm and use all possible “gimmicks” to prolong life. So far no one had been able to avoid death. Death and birth unavoidably co-exist. Death and birth are the laws of nature. Even with this knowledge, all living creatures still fear death. When small animals are stalked and hunted, they try their utmost to escape. All living creatures have this instinct to survive and avoid death; therefore, Buddha taught, “just as we fear death, other animals fear death; therefore, we should not kill or allow others to kill for us.”

Non-human fear of death will not be discussed here. We will consider humans' fear of death and how to overcome this fear. There is a custom of "making merit to prolong life." Such a ceremony is performed and is popular because we want to prolong this life, forever if possible. But in truth, those with any wisdom know that to live longer is like carrying a heavy burden: it is not all full of joy. However, we prefer it rather than face death. There is peace of mind after such a ceremony is performed.

An old folk tale told of a Deva named Supatithita, who feared death after seeing the omen of death confronting him. He had profuse sweat from his underarms and his "flower of life" started to wither. The great fear seized his heart, and he sought out others wiser and higher rank than he for advice. But even the supreme of all Devas could not placate his fear and advised him to seek the Buddha. The Deva approached the Buddha and was given a sermon called

### **Unahissavichai.**

After hearing the Buddha's sermon, the Deva had purity in his heart, was devoid of worry and fear of death. Those who heard of this sermon took it to mean that it prevented death, and it became popular in the North and Northeast of Thailand as a blessing to prolong life.

We should consider what the sermon means - does it prevent death? It does not prevent ultimate death, but prevents untimely death. The sermon has no promise of eternal life, but the generations since do not understand and actually wish for its mystical power. When the exact wording of the sermon is analyzed and understood, there is no magic spell. It speaks of cause and effect and is the true teaching of the Buddha:

***Atthi unahissavijayo  
Dhammo loke anuttaro  
Sabbasattahitatthāya  
Tam tvam ganhāhi devate***

*Heed my word, Deva! Such pure dhamma as  
the Unahissavichai is beneficial and uplifting  
to all creatures in this world. You should,  
therefore, embrace this dhamma.*

***Parivijje rājatande  
Amanussehi pāvake  
Bayagghe nāgevisebhāte  
Akālamaranena vā***

*The dhamma frees you from punishment by  
humans, harassment by non-humans, from  
danger of forest fires, tigers, serpents, poisons,  
and evil spirits.*

***Sabbasmā maranā mutto  
Thapetvā kālamāritam***

*Untimely death is thus avoided. Only timely  
death will occur.*

***Tasseva ānubhāvena  
Hoto devo sukhā sadā***

*The power of the dhamma will allow the Devas  
to remain in a blissful state.*

***Suddhasālam samādaya  
Dhammam sucaritam care***

*Live strictly according to the precepts; apply  
dhamma honestly*

***Tasseva anubhāvena  
Hotu devo sukhā sadā***

*The power of the dhamma will allow the devas to remain  
in a blissful state.*

***Likkhitam cintiam pājam  
Dhāranam vācānam garum  
Paresam desanam sutvā  
Tassaāyu pavaddhatāti***

*Having heard the dhamma, we written it, thought it,  
worshipped it, kept it in mind, discussed it, and having  
unwavering respect for that dhamma you will live well  
your expected life span.*

That is all that the Gathā Unahissavichai addressed. The person who created the Gathā (sermon) used dhamma to deter death so that those who follow the dhamma would be save from all kinds of untimely death, but would not untimely escape death. The end of the Gathā emphasizes the fact that in order for life to continue to prosper, the dhamma has to be follow in earnest, remain in one's thought and mind, and be thought to others, and have unwavering respect paid to it.



It is thus surmised that only dhamma will protect us from untimely death, and one must be strict and honest in following the precepts. In short, living according to the dhamma and teaching others the dhamma will result in the prevention of untimely death.

Understand that the dhamma in the Gathā deters only untimely death, but can never prevent timely death. The dhamma that would prevent ultimate death is a higher level of dhamma for those who have reached the depth of understanding. They will be above death as they remain selfless and do not have the delusion of being attached to anything - no being, no person. At the highest level of dhamma in Buddhism, death is completely removed from one's mind: no more questions or problems concerning the fear of death arise. In a conversation where Mokharaj asked the Buddha, "What does one need to do to avoid death?," the Buddha replied:

***Sunnato loke avekkassu  
Moghāraja sadā sato***

*Heed my word Mokharaj. Always view the world with  
mindfulness and detachment. When the world is seen in  
that light, death will no longer frighten you.*

In Buddhism, when one reaches the truth through practicing the highest level dhamma, the fear of death will disappear and will no longer have any influence on one's life. We should remember that the path that leads us to become one with the concepts of 'Sunnyata' (nothingness) and 'Anatta' (no self/no control) is an important one - it is the heart of Buddhism.

To those who are afraid of death, if you don't want to face death you have to practice the dhamma that the Buddha taught to Mokharaj cited above. When the mind reaches peace, purity, and clarity, fear will disappear because the mind will be free as described in the following remark by the Buddha:

***Rāpadhātu parinnāya  
Arāpesu asanthitā  
Nirodhe ye vimuccanti  
Te janā maccuhāyino***

*For those who understand that the physical phenomena (rupadhat) are not attached to the mental phenomena (namadhat), there is cessation of suffering (nirodha). Those people are thus beyond the cycle of birth and death.*

The best way to lengthen one's life, to avoid untimely death, is to conduct oneself strictly according to the five precepts. That is, to avoid bad deeds (physically and verbally); not to kill; not to steal; to refrain from illicit sexual activities; to avoid lying (false speech, namely malicious gossip, crude language, or meaningless chatter. This is the life-lengthening elixir. Always remember what the monks teach us: those who want to live long should follow the precepts and spread living kindness.

For people who would like to flee the grasp of death, the higher level of the Dhamma should be sought. Apply meditation and awareness to observe the body and mind, and to see the three inter-related basic characteristics of existence:

Aniccatā -	Impermanence (all things are constantly changing)
Dukkhatā -	Unsatisfactoriness (stress and dissatisfaction occur because of these changes)
Anattatā -	no self/no control (we mistakenly believe that we can exert control over the forces of nature)

When we reach this understanding, our minds will be free from attachment; thus, the fear death will lose its grip on us.

### Blind minded man

***Konu hāso kimānando  
Niccama pajjalite sati  
Andhakārena onaddhā  
Padāpama nāgavesatha***

*Why is there celebration when the world is in  
constant flame? All of you are lost in darkness.  
Why not seek a torch to guide the way?*

The Buddha spoke of the women friends of Nang Visakha. The friends indulged in alcohol and intoxicants. Their husbands asked Nang Visakha to help their wives, and so she brought them to the Buddha to hear his teachings.

The friends came with their hidden bottles and suck drinks until they became intoxicated. Feeling tipsy and in-

toxicated, they decided to perform songs and danced for the Buddha. The Buddha, sensing the reason for their behavior, evoked a supernatural phenomenon causing darkness to envelop them and causing extreme fear among the women. So great was their fright that the drunkenness disappeared. The Buddha then taught his sermon on the dangers of unmindfulness.

All people, no matter what period they live in or what country, if they are mired in ignorance, their minds are blinded. Even friends of Nang Visakha, living in the time of the Buddha, who was the most pure, were in this state. Nang Visakha herself attained the first level of enlightenment at the age of seven and was instructing and guiding these friends; yet they did not see the error of imbibing in intoxicants. Even in the compound of the Buddha, they were drinking. Ignorance blinded them to all right and wrong, causing them to act and speak inappropriately. Such is the power of ignorance. The inner intelligence or the inner eye was closed, closed to the teaching, the dhamma. They did not see their own goodness, other people's goodness, and the supreme value of Nirvana to completely extinguish all suffering. They could not see the dhamma is good, is right, and is true. The wrong view of their blinded minds made these people this way.

***The Buddha has states:  
Avijāya nivuto loko***

*When the world is covered with ignorance,  
the Four Noble Truths cannot be seen as  
they really are.*

Ignorance is classified into eight types:

1. Ignorance of suffering
2. Ignorance of the cause of suffering
3. Ignorance of the cessation of suffering
4. Ignorance of the past to the cessation of suffering
5. Ignorance of the past
6. Ignorance of the future
7. Ignorance of both past and future
8. Ignorance of the law of conditionality

When we speak of the world, it is non-human objects such as land or mountains; it means the living humans, men and women. It is these humans that are covered in ignorance so they cannot see and the mind is blinded. Just as a chicken inside the shell cannot see what is outside, so too a human ignorant of the truth cannot see beyond the ignorance. Even a bright mind will lose its brightness when the darkness of ignorance covers it. People do not see that there is suffering; thus, they cannot know what cause it. They do not know how suffering ceases; thus, they do not know which path leads to cessation of suffering.

They do not know the past, the future, both the past and future, or the law of conditionality because they lack the wisdom to see what is what.

Our life is full of suffering, according to the Buddha's sermon:

***Dukkham eva hi sambhoti  
Dukkham tittathi veti ca***

***Nānātara dukkhā sambhoti  
Nānātara dukkhā nirujjhati***

*Only suffering arises, remains, and is  
extinguished. If there is no suffering,  
nothing is born; nothing is extinguished*

Suffering is classified into ten types:

1. Nibbatthadukkha. Constant suffering that is inherent to all. Discomfort/suffering from changes in weather (too hot or too cold), changes in our physical body (hunger, thirst, bowel urges, bladder urges, muscular aches, etc.) that occur. Rick and poor alike feel these. If hunger cannot be satisfied, then there can be an intense suffering of hunger. Food can lessen hunger, but it cannot completely end it. We still need to eat several times a day, every day, all through our lives. Thirst, bowel urges body aches can be lessened but will constantly recur to all without exception.

2. Byadhidukkha. Pathological suffering is illness, pain occurring from disease or abnormalities of our body. When weakened, we are more susceptible to disease and inclement weather. Everyone will have some illness eventually; no one, not even physicians are exempt.

3. Sabhavadukkha. Physical and mental suffering caused by aging and death. The elderly are more aware of this condition, but our younger ones also know this because they certainly do not relish getting older. People worry about aging and fear death. This causes suffering by attempting to avoid what is unavoidable. There is no power or medicine to overcome death. The only prevention for suffering of aging and death is to “not be born.”

4. Pakinnakadukkha. Miscellaneous sufferings from sadness: discontent when we are separated from our loved ones, when we are not where we want to be, when we are

where we do not want to be, or when we cannot have what we desire. All people, rich or poor, have these experiences. We all have hope, desire, or want never to be disappointed or separated from a loved one or a loved possession. It may affect us in varying degrees and is ever present in us. Only the enlightened ones do not have this miscellaneous suffering.

5. Santapadukkha. Suffering due to passion stems from defilements such as love, anger, jealousy or vengeance. Anyone who has not reached enlightenment is prone to suffer under these conditions.

6. Vipakatadukkha. Suffering due to guilty conscience results from fear of having done bad deeds. Those who have committed bad deeds usually suffer from mental anguish. This type of suffering can be avoided by not committing wrong action, speech, or thought; however, very few people but an enlightened one can achieve this.

7. Aharapariyitthidukkha. Suffering stems from the mental and physical toil, worry, and anguish when competing to make a living for yourself and your family. Many people have lost their lives while struggling to maintain their livelihood.

8. Sahagatadukkha. Suffering that comes with the attainment of wealth, status, and praise. This means that all these things cause suffering, for when there is wealth, there can be loss of wealth. When there is high rank or position, there can be loss of position. When there is praise, there can be gossip or criticism. And when there is happiness, there can be depression. These opposites coexist. Rich people can lose their fortunes, being unable to sleep or eat, and some even end up losing their minds as well. The Buddha taught us not to be attached to fame, fortune, and praise



because they are usually tenuous. But for most people this is a very difficult thing to do.

9. Vivadamulakadukkha. Suffering due to conflicts. Having to live with others who have different opinions and tastes can create conflicts, conflicts can lead to anger and hatred which cause suffering. There can be strong arguments and revenge that lead to fights or even killing. Conflicts are certainly a cause of suffering.

10. Dukkakandha. Suffering due to attachment and possessiveness. This is the ultimate suffering - we get attached to our bodies and minds (the five aggregates), believing that they actually belong to us, that we can accept the nature of things, all suffering mentioned above would cease.

Most of us do not understand suffering because ignorance blinds our hearts so that there is no wisdom and we cannot recognize suffering around us. When we don't recognize the suffering, we let ourselves be deluded by the illusions of happiness and pleasure, just like a moth flies into a brilliant flame. Very few people can escape the trap of this illusion of happiness.

***Andhabhāto ayam loko  
Tanukettha vipassati  
Sakuno jālamuttova  
Appo saggāya gacchati***

*Most living creatures have the wrong view;  
very few have the right view that lead to  
the state of true happiness. Like a flock of  
birds trapped in a hunter's net, very few  
can escape.*

Nowadays, most people are trapped in ignorance, their view obscured by defilements, seeing only illusions. Although they call themselves Buddhists, they ignore the Buddha's teaching. People of all strata of society can fall victim to belief in mystical powers to protect and support them, but these beliefs lead only to more ignorance. They are blind to the truth.

Most people with wrong view end up in the dark. Ignorance creates delusion and foolishness as taught by the Buddha:

***Etha passathimam lokam  
Cittam rājarathāpamam  
Yattha bālā visādanti  
Natthi sanggo vijānatam***

*Listen! all of you. The world seems like  
a gleaming and brilliant carriage which  
attracts those who are still clinging to  
wrong view, while those with right view  
see it for what it is and are not attracted  
to it.*

From this saying, most of us on the earth are like the blind, living like a person who is lost, unable to find the way. Sometimes we fall into the fire, and we are happy living in our defilements. This ignorance causes physical and mental suffering.

This is the penalty of people who are attached to the world - beaten by the world like slaves on a plantation. So the Buddha said to look at world, know it for what it is, and see it as an illusion.

Thus, those with wisdom practice meditation and are not infatuated with illusion. There is nothing left but wisdom, peace, purity, and clarity which lead to stability in life.

## PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE DHAMMA

People in the era of high technology with computers are not interested in the dhamma or speak of one who has the dhamma. Most are more interested in glorifying and revering people who have power, rank, money, big house, boats, cars, businesses, degrees in education. These are the excesses that people value.

One thing that is important and should be mentioned is that when people talk about dhamma among good friends, the friends say, “Why are you speaking of this thing? That is useless in our lives. The dhamma is something for old people, who go to the temple, to be interested in. We have so much of our own business and work to do. Why should we pay attention to the dhamma? It is waste of time for us.” This is mistaken belief of these ‘modern’ people. That is why nobody talks about one who has the dhamma as much as they should.

The one who has dhamma - what kind of person is this? What good is the person who has the dhamma? The one who has the dhamma is the one who acts out the dhamma as a habit, who practices the dhamma regularly, continuously, with any break. This is the one who has the dhamma. Dhamma is goodness, correctness, and the truth. Whoever has goodness, correctness, and the truth in their heart can be called the one who has the dhamma.

When we talk about dhamma, we remember the phrase of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu:

*Nowadays all we do is ‘wai’ [show respect], but when we are told to practice the dhamma, we close our ears.*

This is rather strange. Every human, nation, religion, language, and ethnic group wants to have happiness and have a better life. but the main factor that brings happiness and progress so that it is a blessing to our lives is the dhamma. But then, why don't we like to make offerings for magical protection and happiness.

Big trees or spirit houses, where this and that spirit reside, are considered sacred. The area overflows with offerings. Everybody thinks that paying respect and making offerings will bring benefits that will cause them to be happy and have a better life, including security and safety in life. In this way, they think as one who is blinded, who is darkness, who does not understand the truth. But the factor that causes safety, happiness, and improvement in all ways has to be according to the dhamma.

The monks teach us:

Dhamma is what will protect one who practices.

Dhamma that is done well will bring happiness.

This is the result of practicing dhamma.

One who practices dhamma regularly will not stray toward evil or disaster.

All of you will probably be able to see by now that if we wish to have security, happiness, and be better in every way in our lives, we should walk along the path the Buddha has laid down for us; that is, to and follow the dhamma. The

dhamma is sacred; it has the power to make one who practice it, better. Practicing the dhamma can, for example, make the common person become more learned, ascend to a higher spiritual realm of 'deva', '*indira*', or '*brahma*'. The practice of the dhamma can even lead to eventually becoming an enlightened one who has entered the right path, and finally, nibbana.

We all should not be mistaken to just pay respect and when asked to practice the dhamma and follow the teaching, act as if we don't hear and become disinterested. It is like the saying, "When asked to practice the dhamma, you cover your ears." You don't want to hear; you don't want to listen. When it comes to mystical offerings, casting of spells, fortune telling, no matter how far away, you try to get there. However, when it comes to practicing the dhamma, even it is right next door, you will say that you don't have time. Just think about it. Is there really no time to practice dhamma? Then what do you do with all your time? That is the excuse for people who are afraid of the dhamma. Don't be afraid of the dhamma; the word "dhamma" is something that will bring you happiness. Doesn't everybody want happiness? If that is so, we should all practice the dhamma. The happiness from practicing the dhamma bring us a refined happiness. It is intense and not comparable to anything else. It is happiness that will last forever, that does not change like worldly happiness. Worldly happiness is happiness intermixed with misery. Therefore, true happiness is that which is from the heart, which is peaceful, without kilesa [defilement] - that which comes from practicing the dhamma.

When the Buddha gave an example of practicing the dhamma for all us humans to follow, many people misunderstood that practicing the dhamma is old fashioned, not up

to date with the changes and developments in the present society. But the Buddha still encouraged everyone to practice as much as they are able because without practicing the dhamma, we are no different from animals; we have no values. The worth of each human depends on the result of their practicing the dhamma. The Buddha encouraged people to practice the dhamma because he was concerned that all humans will become savage and not be able to improve or better their lives. This is similar to parents encouraging their children to take medicine. The parents try the best they can to get the medicine in, and if the children cannot take the medicine by themselves, the parents have to force the medicine in. No matter how hard, it is done with love, wishing the children would be in better health. Every child hates medicine, but every child has had to take it and has become better for having gone through it.

The dhamma makes people civilized, but why is there a misunderstanding that practicing the dhamma is old fashioned? In the end, all of us act like children who do not want to take medicine. The Buddha gives us medicine, which is the dhamma for people's hearts, with the hope that we will all live together in peace, no matter what era or time. When people are practicing the dhamma, in that era the world will be filled with happiness and peace. There will be development and progress in every way. Our house could be heaven, with people living together filled with happiness. The dhamma is always current and always practical. We should be practicing dhamma, my dear friends.

The dhamma has depth and breadth, but to better understand our practice of the dhamma, we can summarize it easily as goodness, correctness, and truth. When a person practices these things, it is like armor that protects you. It is the

best refuge and keeps us safe. We should be more interested in studying and practicing the dhamma; don't say you don't have the time or the dhamma doesn't concern you, or else you will be sorry later. Now that we are born and living on this earth, we should do good, do correct things, and live in truth so that we will be able to say that we are the one who "has the dhamma." This is like building an inheritance that is so valuable for the generation that follows us so that it can be an example for the next generation. It is like the saying, "Do good for your children. Do the correct things for your children's children."

To practice the dhamma according to the Buddha's teaching doesn't have to cost you anything. It just depends on your willingness to do it. The dhamma can be done every second, every day, and it should be followed. The one who has the dhamma is like someone who has an umbrella: the sun cannot harm you, the rain will not get you wet. Be it sunny or rainy, the one who has the umbrella is without worry. Similarly, with the dhamma, you are safe, you can go anywhere, nothing can happen to you. Wherever you go, whatever you do, you have safety. The one who has dhamma is loved by all. Having the dhamma is like being born under a lucky star that will enable you to be successful in everything you do. So you should be practicing the dhamma - that is, to do good, do correct things, and be truthful so that this will be a blessing to you and better your life in every way.

To practice the dhamma is walk the pathway of goodness by:



- doing good with bodily actions - called right action
- doing good with speech - called right speech
- doing good with the mind - called right thought

Each of these three can be broken down into more refined guidelines, providing 10 ways to walk the pathway of goodness:

There are three aspects of right action

1. Avoid killing
2. Avoid stealing
3. Avoid adultery

There are four aspects of right speech

4. Avoid lying
5. Avoid sarcasm
6. Avoid lewd or crude remarks
7. Avoid gossip or idle chatter

There are three aspects of right thought

8. Not coveting/desiring others
9. Not wishing harm to others
10. Seeing that the dhamma is good

Living in this way called the path of Righteous living well.

Practicing the dhamma can be interpreted from another perspective, summarized or broken down in two ways:

- 1) to act in the right way,
- 2) to practice according to the dhamma

To act in the right way means that whatever situation you are in, you try to make it better, to be in the right way. For example, when you are a student, you fulfill your duty by studying hard to do it correctly and well. If you are in the role of parents, you fulfill your duty as parents well and in the correctly way. If you are a civil servant, a housewife, a monk or nun, you have to do the best possible job with what is given to you. Whatever situation or position you are in, try to fulfill your duty in the best possible way and in the most correct way, avoiding mistakes and not causing any loss. Such behavior is acting in the right way.

The second meaning of practicing according to the dhamma is following the principles of sila [morality], sammadhi [mental discipline], and panna [wisdom] to a high level in order to eliminate or vanquish the defilements which are coarse, moderate, and refined. To practice according to morality is to control your bodily actions and verbal actions so that they do not cause harm to you or others. These bodily and verbal actions are defilements that are coarse, such as harassment, stealing, adultery, lying, sarcasm, crude words, and idle gossip. When we practice according to morality, the coarse defilements will be vanquished and will not be seen.

To practice mental discipline is to train the mind to be calm, vanquishing the moderate defilements. These moderate defilements are hindrances which prevent the mind from reaching that which is good. The moderate defilements are kamachanda, attachment to sensual desire; *byapada*, ill will, vengeful and hateful behavior; *thinamiddha*, lethargy and lack of motivation; *uddhaccakukkucca*, anxiety and restlessness; *vicikiccha*, doubts. All these will be eliminated after practicing mental discipline.

To eliminated the refined defilements, which are embedded in the core of your being, you need to practice insight meditation so that wisdom will arise, to be able to see that which is illusion, to destroy ignorance, to eliminate craving and clinging. What will the be left will be a mind that is calm peaceful, and clear. The mind is no longer enslaved by the defilements and craving anymore.

Practicing morality, mental discipline, and wisdom in these ways is practicing the dhamma at the highest level. Starting from having no morality, we can train ourselves to be one who has morality. Having never practiced mental discipline, we can train ourselves so that concentration will occur. If we have no wisdom, by practicing insight meditation, wisdom will arise so that we will be able to realize what is true. We will be able to follow the path leading to Nibbana at the end.

To practice the dhamma correctly, we should follow the Buddha's instructions for his monks to practice in four ways:

- |                          |                                                 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| - <b>Supatipanno</b>     | the one who has good actions and practices well |
| - <b>Ujupatipanno</b>    | the one who practice correctly                  |
| - <b>Nayapatipanno</b>   | the one who practice the dhamma                 |
| - <b>Samicipatipanno</b> | the one who practices properly                  |

**Supatipanno** - good practice. What is good practice? Good practice for the average person would be knowing what one's duty is. Each person has to try to do his duty as well as possible. There can be no dereliction of duty. As

a student, as an educator, a civil servant, a housewife, monk or nun, each of us has to know our duty and do it well. To further exceed the normal or go to a higher level would mean to practice the eight-fold path with morality, mental discipline, and wisdom which will eliminate or destroy ignorance, craving, and clinging.

**Ujupatipanno** - to act correctly. This means to do things in a straight-forward way, without deviousness. That is to practice toward the final goal, to practice according to the teaching of the religion, and to act forthrightly in dealing with others. If we are to go beyond this, we must work through the eight-fold path straight to the Nibbana, straight to the elimination of dukkha.

**Nayapatipanno** - practice of dhamma. This means the goal is that we should be fair in our actions. On a higher level, these actions will lead us to understand the four noble truths:

1. Dukkha is suffering which we recognize
2. Samudaya - the cause of suffering. This is the situation which we should eliminate.
3. Nirodha - cessation of suffering. The realization that there is a way to end suffering.
4. Magga - The eight-fold path to end suffering. This is the path we should be following.

**Samicipatipanno** - to act in the appropriate way. This is done in the general society, that is, to act with manners, be aware of what is socially acceptable, to act appropriately for the situation. The monks classify it as one who acts appropriately for his condition or status. At a higher level, the actions would be practicing morality, mental discipline, and wisdom. This is what would be lauded and respected by other people.

As we have summarized above, it could be understood that one who has the dhamma will bring about benefits in the present and future. The ultimate result will be Nibbana.

## SUPRAMAN

*One who has wisdom*

*Has forsaken the five hindrances of the  
mind, Eliminating defilements and all  
sorrow, love and hatred, greed and ego,  
Thus journeys alone like a rhinoceros.*

At the present time, science has advanced to the utmost. It is commonplace to see man sent up into space. Seemingly, our earth appears to be too small, so that we go beyond to find another world. We dream that we will be living in outer space. Who knows? It seems to be imminent. Today, new technology is advancing; all the experts are announcing their discoveries one after the other. This means that we who used to earth now fly into the sky like a conqueror and no longer believe ourselves earthbound. In the future, if the world becomes more frenetic, man will move on to another place in the galaxy and build his heavenly abode.

In our eyes, we think people in the space era will have incredible super power. With highly developed intelligence and advanced abilities, they will be able to go underground, fly up into space, appear and disappear miraculously. Man has conquered every barrier. What is there that we cannot overcome? What is there that technology cannot achieve? Humans will know everything that exists in the universe.

Thus, the whole universe will be controlled by man. Eventually, man will believe himself beyond this world. From this view, it seems to be true that this is the era of the ‘super human’.

In the eyes of materialistic people, this is true. But if we look at it from the point of view of the dhamma, all these assertions are false because all the discoveries and conquests are part of this world. It is the physical world, not the whole world. There is another part that scientists have overlooked: the spiritual world. It seems like the scientists in the world have no idea of its existence and, thus, ignore its importance. So all the research is in the physical world, and no attention is given to the research in the spiritual world. Even if we can conquer the physical world and go beyond space, if we do not understand the spiritual world, we are still influenced by this world. Therefore, so that all of us can study the ‘super human’ according to the dhamma, I would like you to come and study Buddhism.

Buddhism is based on reason. It teaches men to search for the truth in the same way as the scientific method. But experiments in Buddhism do not require a big scientific complex or million dollar equipment. Spiritual experiment only requires a body a fathom long, one-hand thick, a forearm wide. Whoever experiments in the spiritual world uses his own body as the laboratory. Our bodies are composed of two important parts: body and mind (also called physical and mental phenomena). Physical phenomena are what can be seen and touched. Mental phenomena are the perceptions, thoughts, feelings that arise through the sense consciousness via eye, ear, nose, tongue, and touch. The scientific study of the mind is carried out using three instruments:

1. **Atapi** the strong endeavor to overcome defilements
2. **Sampajano** universal knowledge
3. **Satima** constant awareness

The first phase of the scientific experiment into mental phenomena is calm the mind. When the mind is in tranquility meditation, it will see things as they really are, not as we mistakenly perceive them to be. Just as a scientist analyzes an object to know its basic elements, so too will tranquility meditation enable you to see the basic nature of what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched.

Mind that is lacks concentration is manipulated by worldly influences. When outside stimuli contact the senses - eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body - the mind is swayed by these stimuli. They create the feelings of love, anger, confusion, and addiction. The one who lacks concentration has great obstacles preventing him from undergoing the scientific experiment on the mind. It is necessary to practice concentration so that the mind can be stable, pure, and suitable for the scientific mental experiment to recognize things as they are.

*Just as a person will not see the oyster,  
the abalone, the sand, or the fish in the  
muddy water,*

*So too will the person be unable to see  
the reality of things when the mind is  
clouded.*



*Just as person can see the oyster, the  
abalone, the sand, and fish in clear water,  
So too can a person with a clear mind  
see the truth.*

Meditation to achieve concentration is a way of filtering and clearing the mind to be able to see the truth. The great obstacles to concentration leading to peace of mind are the five hindrances:

1. **Kamachanda** - satisfaction in loving, wanting, and yearning. This burns in the mind and causes constant agitation like a rabid dog.

2. **Byapada** - dissatisfaction with everything. It leads to restlessness, constantly searing and agonizing mind like a sharp weapon embedded in your heart.

3. **Thinamiddha** - sloth and torpor, caused by delusion. It makes the mind listless, fatigued, and constantly sleepy.

4. **Uddhaccakukkucca** - distractedness and worry. Worrying about events in the past and events yet to come and complaining that draws the mind away from the present. As in the rainy season the clouds come from all directions to block the sunlight, causing darkness.

5. **Vicikiccha** - hesitation and doubt which block the arising of wisdom. There is always doubt as to whether the path to enlightenment and Nibbana (Nirvana) truly exists. There is questioning of the meaning of physical and mental phenomena and the cessation of suffering. This is similar to the traveler who comes to a fork in the road and, not knowing which way to go, sits there forever, wondering which road to take.

To overcome the five hindrances, we need the three instruments mentioned before:

1. **Atapi** - the strong endeavor to overcome defilements, or die trying

2. **Sampajano** - universal knowledge; functioning moment to moment with universal knowledge of the truth of existence so as not to be led astray by defilements.

3. **Satima** - to be in constant awareness, observing the mind at all times; never letting mind think by itself; paying constant attention to what arises in mind. We watch moods and thoughts arising and disappearing and know how they affect the mind.

When we use these three instruments, the five defilements will disappear from our minds. The mind will be peace and sustain concentration. Too much concentration, however, without awareness, can lead to mental images, of which there are five types:

1. Self-mimicking images. These are reflections of ourselves seen by the mind. The image does what you do: stand, walk, sit, bend over, stretch, or move. If you ask it to do something, it will do as you wish. To make this go away, you have to use your awareness. When awareness is as strong as concentration, these images will disappear because they are not real.

2. Blissful images. These come from the aesthetic part of the mind. They create beautiful images such as colorful flowers, gilded pagodas, devas, and heavenly abodes which fill the mind with bliss. Whoever is attached to these are caught in the wheel of samsara, just like a bird caught in the hunter's net. These images will disappear when awareness reveals things as they are.

3. Frightening images. Fierce animals like a charging elephant, a tiger about to claw you, a snake about to strike, a dog trying to bite you, a skeleton or a rotting corpse - all terrifying images. To rid ourselves of these images, we must be aware of the present moment.

4. Intentionally created images. When we think of something, it appears to us. We think of the moon, and it appears; we imagine objects to be larger or smaller, and they become so. We think of heaven and hell, and they appear. When we think of the enlightened ones or the Buddha, their images appear. Whatever we think of spontaneously appears. These are all just created images, not natural conditions. Having awareness will make them disappear.

5. Supplicating images. These arise from lack of awareness. They can be tormented souls asking for merit or corrupted, misguided spirits that haunt us with frightening together with awareness will miraculously make these images disappear.

By overcoming the five hindrances and destroying the five mental images, the barriers that are preventing us from entering the 'Supramundane State' have been removed. From here, the mind can establish concentration to attain peace, purify, and clarity. Thus, we can proceed in our scientific experiment of the mental phenomena to discover the truth in all things, test the truth that is in this fathom-long, one-hand-thick, forearm-wide body. So we can look at ourselves, tell ourselves, and use ourselves to test and prove the truth of annica (impermanence, always changing), dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), and anatta (no-self, not under anyone's control). These are the true characteristics of all that exists in nature. When the mind has grasped the true nature of

things as explained here, the mind will be free of all attachments and enter the path toward enlightenment leading to Nibbana. One is longer under the power of the defilements and craving. The mind is free of all attachments and enters the 'Supramundane State', and thus, one has become truly 'Supra Human'.

From the point of view of the dhamma, one becomes a 'Supra Human' because he/she is 'above' all worldly influences. Even while living in the world, the mind is no longer a slave to defilements and craving, and one lives with freedom - complete freedom from suffering. And thus this person has earned the title 'Supraman'.



# TOMORROW MAN

***Ajjeva Kiccamatappam  
Ko Janna Maranam Suve  
Na Hi No Sangharantena  
Mahasenena Maccuna.***

*One should definitely do one's job today.  
Who knows, tomorrow death could come.  
Absolutely no way can one bargain  
with the mighty LORD of DEATH.*

Past is past, do not yearn  
for it to turn back.  
What hasn't come, do not  
take for granted it'll come.  
yesterday will never rerun  
its track.  
"Tomorrow will have yet to arrive."

Thus one should earnestly perform  
one's duty today.  
Who would know we shall live tomorrow?  
Impossibly can a person bargain or sway,  
The mighty DEATH to allow him or her to stay.

There are in a year 365 days or 12 months' December being the last one of the year. It is customary for most of us to assume the passing year to be the "old" year and call the coming year, beginning with January, the "new" year. "Old" and "new" are only notions that we make up for

convenience of communication; otherwise we would hardly understand each other. No forces can stop their motion. They constantly and dutifully move just like they - never stand still. Thus it is “life” that loses its tenure to time, as illustrated in one of the Buddhist proverbs.

***Kalo Khasati Bhutani Sabbaneva Sahattana***

*Time consumes, together with its own self,  
the lives of all beings.*

From the time we are born, time continuously from the beginning to the end - shortens our lives. Depending upon various factors and causes accumulated through time, some of us have a short life and some have a long one. Life is generally short for those who have not kept themselves healthy, and long for those who have done well. The Buddha once said:

***Yatha Dandana Gopala Gavo Pajeti  
Gocaram  
Evam Jara Ca Najju Ja Ayum Pajenti  
Paninam.***

*Just like a cowhand herds cattle to grazing land,  
So do aging and death the lives of all beings.*

Those of you who desire happiness and progress in life should not feel so overconfident that you neglect to do the good things your duty and professions call for. As time never stops running, how can one feel complacent and not race against time in performing good deeds? Do not let time



pass without making good use of it. As minute by minute passes, life is getting shorter. We therefore must hurriedly carry some worthy work now, this minute, today, this month, this year. Do not procrastinate in working on something good. Be reminded of the Buddhā's inquiry, "As day and night are passing by, what have you been doing?"

There are three steps of worthy actions:

First, one must seek knowledge.

Second, one must seek wealth.

Third, one must seek morality and righteousness.

In the present-day society, most people can perform the first two steps of worthy actions quite well. There are, of course, some exceptions. A few people who prefer "folding their arms and feet" to making efforts can be regarded as ones who are careless and neglect their own living. Since knowledge and wealth are basic foundations of happiness and a secure life, lacking the two will cause hardship, suffering from substandard living and missing the normally expected enjoyment of life. Therefore one should not wait until tomorrow but act now, today, to undertake these worthy actions.

The third worthy action, however, is not attractive to most of us. We are not as much interested in as we should be. We often put it off until tomorrow and tomorrow. Some people keep procrastinating, and until the time they reach the cemetery, never adequately live a moral and righteous life. This type of person always - as it is said in Thai - "muffle their ears whenever someone asks them to hear Dharma". Especially those who are so addicted to material-

ism, they hardly want to hear about spiritualism. Spiritualism, to them, is outdated, prehistoric and suitable only for the intellectually weak mind. To them, problems can be solved only by materialism; material things can provide happiness in all aspects of life in modern societies. To them, seeking spiritual knowledge is wasting valuable time and useful only to outdated mentality. Spiritual development is not for those who were born in the advanced scientific and technological age. These are generally viewpoints of materialism. This, in turn, leads them to take advantage of one another, to race against one another in greed, just and ego. Finally, undesirable instincts are developed:

Fighting for possession of food.  
Fighting for possession of land.  
Fighting for possession of a mate.  
Fighting for possession of power.

Those who shun spiritual development lack one important foundation of life. No matter how high their knowledge and degrees are - be they baccalaureate, master, or doctoral - together with the wealth of a millionaire, they are only to be haunted by wealth of a millionaire, they are only to be haunted by mental disorder and have mental clinics as their residence. It seems appropriate therefore to present the story of the "Tomorrow Man" to you as something to think about on this day that marks the ending of 1988.

Our Buddha is the one who has been enlightened, who has been awakened and who has helped awaken others to become like himself. He was not negligent - letting time, days, months and years pass by uselessly. Without him, our lives would be barren, like fallen logs in jungle; even these

logs are more useful than those who lack morality and righteousness.

Many of us, when urged to perform good deeds in accordance with religious principles, often say it is not quite the right time yet. Spiritual matters can wait. This is the time to make a living. No need to be concerned about morality and righteousness as yet. Making a living takes a lot of time; I have no time such that none is left for Dharma, spiritual development? There are 365 days or 12 months in a year. Couldn't one mark about 50 days or one and a half months for Dharma?

DHARMA is none other than goodness, righteousness and truth. Those who are interested in DHARMA are those who are interested in goodness, righteousness and truth. We, of whatever race, tongue or religious inclination, all desire goodness righteousness and truth. Goodness is so universal that everyone should be interested in it. Those who pass off goodness and postpone making good efforts so consistently are the ones who deserve the title of "Tomorrow Man". Not bad. A nice title, one may say. That is why there are unbelievably large numbers of "Tomorrow Men" and "Tomorrow Women" in our society today. The tomorrow men and women postpone doing good and delay spiritual development. They think they should enjoy to the fullest extent their "youth" (however they define it) and reserve spiritualism for "old" age.

The Buddha teaches us good activities today, right now at this minute. For tomorrow, nobody knows what is going to happen. Besides, nobody can ever catch up with tomorrow, because tomorrow always keeps moving one day ahead of us, just like a Western saying, "Tomorrow never comes." Tomorrow does not really exist; there is only

today. Therefore, my dear fellows, do perform good deeds today. As mentioned earlier, we may live to see tomorrow. When the time comes, nobody can argue, postpone or bargain. The right thing to do is to follow this Buddha's teaching that says;

***Abhittharetha Kalayane  
Papa Cittam Nivarave  
Dantham Hi Karato Punnam  
Papasmim Ramati Mano.***

*Lose no time to do good and protect  
one's mind from bad thoughts, because  
when one delays in doing good one's  
mind will turn to enjoyment of bad ideas.*

As water, by nature, always flows to a lower level, the mind will flow to bad thoughts. To protect one's mind from seeking a lower level, the Buddha urges us to make no delay in performing good deeds. It is the good deed that protects the mind from turning to badness. Talking about badness, everybody is afraid of it. Nobody wants badness. Even the word "bad", nobody wants to hear. No one should therefore behave like the "Tomorrow Man." Instead every one should become the "Today Person", engaging in good deeds now.

The Buddha says:

***Accenti Kala Tarayanti Rattiyo  
Vayo Guna Anupubbam Jahanti  
Atam Bhayam Marane Pekhamano  
Punnank Kayiratha Sukhavahani.***

*Time passes by, day, night, month and  
year slip away. Age advances and  
lifetime gets shorter. Considering such  
danger, all of you should do only the  
good things that will bring happiness.*

Consider this, all tomorrow men! Time is taking the life of all living beings, one by one, the old and the young, the poor and the rich, the fool and the wise, and the bad and the good, all are taken by time. No one has privilege over another. Their lives are equally treated by time. The Buddha reminds us:

As days and nights pass by, life will  
pass away. All living things will come to  
an end, like water in a dried-up steam.

On the occasion of the month that marks the end of the year 1988, the Voice of Dharma from Wat Thai D.C. whispers to all of you, friends of Wat Thai, the wish that you will not be careless, lack SATI - mindfulness and will not keep delaying good deeds until tomorrow, next month or next year. We wish you to stop deceiving yourselves and sticking yourselves into an inescapable trap of bad thoughts and actions. Do make good efforts now, this minute, today, this month and this year. When you make a good effort once, do it again and again, and with contentment that you have done well - like one of the Buddha's sayings:

***Punnance Puriso Kayira  
Kayirathenam Punapunam  
Tamhi Chandam Kayiratha  
Sukho Punnassa Uccaayo.***

*When one makes an effort to do good, one  
should do it again and again and be pleased  
for having done so. The accumulation of  
good deeds will bring one happiness.*

Happiness is the topmost desire of all of us. Happy lives require nourishment from good deeds. Life without good deeds will wither and endlessly burn with the heat of discontentment. Seek therefore good deeds by strengthening, developing and gaining Sila (morality), Samadhi (concentration), and Panna (wisdom); for such will bring peacefulness, cleanliness and enlightenment of the mind leading you to eternal happiness. On this occasion of the ending of the old year and the coming of the new one, the Voice of Dharma from Wat Thai wishes each and every person peacefulness and happiness under the golden canopy of Buddha's teaching.

## **The Buddha's Words in The Dhammapada**

Though month after month, with a thousand,  
One should sacrifice for a hundred years,  
Yet, if only for a moment,  
One should honour the self-restrained  
That honour, indeed, is better

Than a century of sacrifice  
He who ever reverences and respects elders  
Four qualities for him increase:  
Long life, fame, happiness and strength.

Though one should live a hundred years,  
Without conduct and concentration,  
Yet, better is a single day's life  
Of one who is wise and meditative.

Though one should live a hundred years,  
Sluggish and inactive  
Yet, better is single day's life  
Of one who intensely exerts himself.

Better is a single day's life of one  
Who discerns the rise and fall of things  
Than a hundred years' life of one  
Who is not comprehending.

Better is a single day's life of one  
Who sees the Deathless  
Than a hundred years' life of one  
Who sees not that state.

Better is a single day's life of one  
Who understands the truth sublime  
Than a hundred yea's life of one  
Who knows not that truth, so high.

*Sathienpong Wannapok*





# SAMADHI

## The training and the benefits

### What is SAMADHI ?

SAMADHI is the firmness and steadiness of the mind. When attaining SAMADHI, the mind stays firm and is not swayed by any feeling or thought that comes in touch with it. A person's mind shows the characteristics of SAMADHI when his or her mind is attached firmly and incessantly to whatever he or she is doing. Ordinarily, most of us have some experience with a naturally developed SAMADHI. For example, we usually have some SAMADHI when we read, write, study and listen. We have some SAMADHI in working and in attending to things of interest.

Normally, we use SAMADHI frequently in our everyday living. This is generally a naturally developed SAMADHI. If we lack this SAMADHI, we will probably not be able to complete successfully any task we are doing. The lack of SAMADHI or firmness of mind is a major factor that some persons leave their jobs unfinished, to keep restarting and restopping their work too frequently and to change their minds and jobs too often. It can therefore be said that SAMADHI is one of the necessities of human life. As much as food is essential for the growth, health and strength of the body, SAMADHI is essential for the growth, health and strength of the mind. Such work is highly celibate and requires a much stronger mental power. It is the Buddhist way of meditation that provides the training method needed to develop such strength of SAMADHI.

## THE MIND TRAINING FOR SAMADHI

Training the mind to achieve SAMADHI- may it be a common SAMADHI for everyday life's activities, SAMADHI for the Jhana-Samapatti stage or the most advanced SAMADHI that leads to the Buddhist Nirvana (Nibbana) - follows the similar process. It is the process in which one uses Sati (mindful observation) - to follow and control one's mind to concentrate on one single object. If the mind sways, wriggles or wanders away from the object, one must hold or pull it back to the object. If the mind moves away again, one must restrain it again and again. With such an unceasing effort over a considerable length of time, the mind will become less and less agitated. Finally it will subside and rest on the object at which one wants it to stay.

A famous Buddhist meditation teacher once used an analogy of training a stubborn calf to describe the mind-training process. To train a wild or stubborn calf, the trainer has to tie one end of a rope around the calf's neck and the other end with a stake. The calf, whenever the stake is pulled out of the ground, the trainer will have to tie it down again. The calf will struggle again and again. If no matter how hard it struggles, the rope does not break nor the stake pulled up, the calf will become weaker and weaker. Finally it will rest at the stake. After frequent repetition of such training, the stubborn calf will become docile and no longer agitated. It is then tame and can be used to perform useful functions. It is a trained calf.

**From this analogy, one should note the following:**

The stake represents the object;

The calf, the mind;

The rope, Sati (mindfulness or mindful observation).

The Buddhist training of the mind is therefore the process in which one uses one's Sati to "tie" one's mind to certain object.

There many objects that one may choose for training of the mind to achieve SAMADHI. The object suggested here is used in the method call "Anapanassati". To follow this method, one used Sati to observe one's own breathing. "Inhaling-exhaling" (Anapana) is the object of observation (Sati) used in this method of meditation.

**THE PROCESS  
OF ANAPANASSATI MEDITATION**

During the training session, you should sit cross-legged on a mat on a floor, with body straight up and eye closed. Mentally locate a point on your midsection about two inches above the navel. When you inhale, your midsection is rising; and it is falling when you exhale. The process of meditation is simply to keep one's mind, at all times, mentally observing the rising and falling of one's midsection. Every time you inhale, mentally observe the rising of your midsection and note mentally to yourself : r-i-s-i-n-g". Every time you exhale , mentally observe the falling of the midsection and note mentally to yourself :f-a-l-i-n-g". The mental notation of the "ris-ing/fal-ling " must be simultaneously with, not before or after, the actual rise and fall of the midsection (ie the inhaling and exhaling). Throughout the period of this

sitting meditation you must try as you can to keep your Sati (mental observation) on the object- which this case is the “rising/fal-ing” - at all times to prevent your breathing from going unobserved. (where the breathing slips by unobserved, it is like when the “rope” breaks; you must try to tie it up again/) By repeating this practice regularly - every morning and evening- you will gain more and more experience in harnessing your mine. The mind will not pointlessly wander as it used to do. It will rest at and stay with the object, the “ris-ing/fal-ling” for a long period of time without much struggling. The more you practice, the more tranquility of the mind you attain. An important point to be kept in mind here is that once the mind becomes peaceful and tranquil which means Samadhi is achieved, one should not feel complacent. One must try to preserve it- not allow it to be lost- by keeping up the practice every day without exception. such endeavor is needed until the SAMADHI is so strong that you are able to bring your mind to SAMADHI at any time in whatever posture you happen to be.

The student of meditation must be able to train his or her mind to reach SAMADHI in any posture- not only in the sitting position. Whether he or she is standing, walking, sitting, lying, working, talking or thinking, he or she must have Sati covering all his /her activities. That is the right way of the mind-training. While the mind-training processed in the preceding paragraph describes mainly the sitting-position meditation, one should know how to meditate in other postures. This is best learned by practicing under supervision of a teacher who specializes in mind-training. The teacher should be an expert both in theory and practice if he or she is going to lead his or her students safely to the desired destination.

## BENEFIT OF SAMADHI

Some of the benefits of SAMADHI have been described earlier. All types of works- whether they are worldly or spiritual- to be successfully completed, need SAMADHI, as an essential ingredient. If those who are studying in schools or colleges train their minds well to achieve SAMADHI, they will succeed in their studies with much more care. With such a trained mind, they will concentrate well in any subject they study. With SAMADHI, they will learn faster, understand the material better, memorize the contents more accurately and enjoy their study.

SAMADHI can be regarded as a foundation of success. Of the persons of equal intelligence, the one who has SAMADHI will work much better than the one who has not. For very refined work, such as the spiritual development process of Vipassana Samathi is required as a foundation without which one will never attain the ultimate goal of Nirvana(Nibbana) While the benefits of SAMADHI can be recited unexhaustively, the Buddha summarized the in to four types:

1. **SAMADHI** that one has well developed and for which one has well practiced will bring happiness in everyday life.
2. **SAMADHI** that one has well developed and for which one has well practiced will provide the right knowledge and understanding of the true nature of all things.
3. **SAMADHI** that one has well developed and for which one has well practiced will help in strengthening and perfection one's mindfulness and comprehensibility.
4. **SAMADHI** that one has well developed and for which one has well practiced will weed out the impurities (that breed evil thoughts and deeds) accumulated deep in the

mind, leaving only purity, like purified water, clear and clean, free of contamination.

All of us who seek happiness in our everyday lives, therefore, should engage in training our minds to attain SAMADHI in the right way. Let us develop SAMADHI to be a sanctuary of our minds. After attaining happiness in everyday life with SAMADHI, We may then pursue true knowledge and understanding, perfect our mindfulness together with clear comprehension and, finally, clean our mind of all impurities and evils. Such a pure mind will lead us to enlightenment and everlasting peace and happiness.

