

*When Ajaan Khao lived in the forests and the mountains, he got the local villagers to lay out three different paths for walking meditation. The first path he used for paying homage to the Lord Buddha, the second for homage to the Dhamma, and the third for homage to the Sangha. He walked caṅkama on these three paths at three different times each day.*



*As soon as he had finished his morning meal, he began walking meditation on the Buddha Pūjā path.*

## Path One



## *Buddha Pūjā*



## *Stepping Forth*

Venerable Ajaan Khao Anālayo was born in the Year of the Rat on Sunday December 28, 1888. His natal village was Baan Bo Chaneng, located in the Nong Kaew sub-district of Amnat Charern district in the province of Ubon Ratchathani. His father's name was Phua and his mother's Rort, and their surname was Khoratha. Khao Khoratha was the fourth of seven children.

Khao Khoratha was a farmer by profession. Working hard, he prospered and made friends easily. By nature, he was honest and upright, always displaying a warm-hearted, generous attitude toward family and friends. Everyone loved and admired him. Because of this he had many acquaintances, who were all good responsible people. In stark contrast to nowadays when having many friends tends to lead to a lot of drinking and carousing where friends in this age of instant gratification are the cause of each other's downfall, dragging one another headlong into a living hell. In those days, people tended toward virtuous conduct, so friendships were wonderfully inspiring and mutually beneficial interactions that never led to personal damage.

When he was 20 years old, his parents arranged for him to be married. His wife's name was Nang Mee. They had seven

children together. He lived the life of a lay person for many years, supporting his family following the customs of the world. It seems, however, that the relationship with his wife was not a smooth and happy one, due to the fact that his wife was never content to remain faithful to her husband. She had a tendency to take advantage of his trusting nature — adulterous behaviour that became a poison damaging the heart of her partner, as well as the wealth and stability of their family. An unfaithful spouse is like a destructive parasite which so damages the relationship that husband and wife can no longer remain together.

In Ajaan Khao's case, however, one is tempted to speculate that his marital situation turned out to be a great boon for him, the fruition of some favourable *kamma*. For had he not been so emotionally traumatized, he may never have considered sacrificing everything to ordain as a Buddhist monk. In any event, it seems almost certain that he began seriously considering life as a monk because of his wife's infidelity; and that he finally decided to ordain for precisely this reason.

When a wife or a husband has a lover — or a wife has many lovers and a husband has many mistresses — the finger of blame points directly at *rāgatañhā*, the *kilesa* of sexual craving. Never being satisfied, *rāgatañhā* sweeps everyone into its defiling sphere of influence: *mahicchatā* — insatiable greed. To avoid damaging the lives of innocent family members, the temptation to commit adultery must be resisted at all costs. Unfortunately, this kind of behaviour is widespread and it seems to increase all the time. For as long as the people of this world are content to follow the lead of sexual craving, they will feel no inclination to view their conduct in the light of Dhamma. The Dhamma teaches: *santutthi paramam dhānam* — contentment is the

greatest treasure. A harmonious, trusting relationship between husband and wife is the essential wealth of any family. The peace and happiness of the family depends on their being able to live in mutual trust and harmony – and on their not going the way of *mahicchata*; that is, husbands and wives whose illicit lovers consume all their time and interest.

*Rāgatañhā*, the defilement of sexual craving, is comparable to a kitchen fire – both are necessary to establishing and maintaining a successful family. Marriage is necessarily a sexual partnership, while a kitchen fire is indispensable for preparing the family's food. Just as heat and electricity are common requisites of human life, so too is *rāgatañhā* a fundamental aspect of human relations, and the driving force behind most human behaviour. If both are used carefully, with proper circumspection, they can sufficiently fulfil people's basic needs in life. But if people carelessly fail to keep these two fires under control, they can certainly cause a conflagration that destroys everything in its path. For this reason, the wise have always taught human beings who live under the influence of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion to think in terms of Dhamma. Dhamma is like cool water that quenches fires in the heart, preventing their spreading and gaining such strength that they destroy the world we live in. So to prevent their becoming a danger to ourselves and others, we should watch over the fires of the heart in the same way that we watch over the kitchen fire to safeguard our family and our possessions.

When Ajaan Khao saw the woman he loved to the bottom of his heart change, endangering and threatening to destroy his heart in a way he never imagined possible, he made up his mind to ordain as a monk. He was disgusted and so enraged

seeing his wife's blatant infidelity that he could hardly control himself. Fortunately, he had sufficient inherent virtue to realise just in time that:

“If I kill her, she will suffer enormous pain, regardless of the fact that she is guilty and knows she's guilty. After all, even an insect bite can be unbearably painful, how much more so the intense pain of death. So I must restrain myself and carefully consider the consequences before it's too late. Why am I so eager to commit such a heinous crime? It is despicable behaviour that all good people abhor and all wise men strongly denounce. What benefit can I possibly gain from killing her? All I'll gain is a heavy penalty of intense suffering bounding back to burn me. Am I the only man who has an unfaithful wife? Hasn't everyone in the world, including the Buddha, his *Arahant* disciples and respected *Ajaans*, encountered similar hellish situations in their lives? Am I really the only one? I must consider quickly and make the right decision! Otherwise, I'll so damage myself that I'll have no virtue left capable of leading me to a good rebirth in the future.

“My reaction to circumstances like this shall become the yardstick by which I measure how clever or how stupid I am, and whether I will progress successfully or whether I am doomed to failure. Throughout history, wise people have never allowed themselves to be overpowered by the evils of this world. Instead, they have thought up clever ways of turning the poisons of evil into a rich fertilizer nourishing Dhamma in the heart. So why should I be willing to render myself a worthless person by doing an evil deed just because someone else has deeply offended me? The world we live in is full of injustices – why should I allow them to dictate my behaviour? If I am

unable to constrain myself now, how will I ever be able to live a life of virtue? By succumbing to the power of a sexual craving that knows no bounds, my wife has abused my trust in her. Should I now abuse her by self-righteously succumbing to the power of anger? If I take my revenge by killing both my wife and her lover, which of us would be more despicable? According to the Buddha's teaching, I would be committing such a grave *kamma* that no amount of love and compassion could absolve me or save me from a certain descent into the agonies of hell. Am I going to put my trust in the anger that is engulfing my heart at this moment, or will I put my faith in the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha – a teaching that has always effectively diminished the pain and suffering of living beings. Consider quickly and make the right decision; otherwise, the malevolent power of the *kilesas* will overtake the Dhamma and totally destroy me.”

Ajaan Khao said that it was incredibly strange and amazing how at the moment that this warning thought arose, it was as if a revered *ajaan* was sitting right in front of him calming his emotions. His heart, which had been like a blazing fire ready to burn to ashes the cause of its misery, suddenly went unusually still and calm. He felt a deep sense of sadness and dismay about his wife's infidelity. At the same time, he pitied her and forgave her from the bottom of his heart. At that moment, he saw clearly the potential harm caused by anger and resentment. When Dhamma arose and his heart went completely still and quiet, Ajaan Khao felt that he had been mercifully spared from rebirth in hell. He felt relieved and supremely peaceful at that moment, as though he had been born once again within the

same mind and body. This caused him to reflect back on the tight bind he had found himself in, and on how he had almost destroyed himself unwittingly by succumbing to the power of anger. He then reflected on how he should properly conduct himself so as not to become contaminated by the same kinds of evil, destructive thoughts in the future, abhorrent thoughts that appalled and disgusted him.

Previous to this incident, Ajaan Khao had thought only about how to fulfil his worldly ambitions. After his wife's infidelity inspired him to think about Dhamma, most of his thinking was focused in that direction, which in turn led to his resolution to be ordained as a monk. He finally realised the harmfulness of the lay person's life where his hopes and dreams were more likely to meet with disappointment than they were fulfilment. In the end, he was so severely hurt that he could hardly bear it. Placing his entire faith in Dhamma, he decided to ordain and practice the way of the Buddha to the utmost of his strength and ability. Once he had informed his family and friends of his decision, he entered the local monastery as a white-robed *upāsika* with the intention of becoming a monk as soon as possible.

Ajaan Khao later explained his predicament like this: "As a lay man I worked very hard to support my family. But the fruits of my labour were just barely sufficient to meet our needs. Often we had to go without. So out of concern for my family I decided to travel to the Central Plains region and hire myself out as a farm labourer. I worked hard and saved my money; then I returned home. Unfortunately, upon my return I discovered that my wife had a lover. At that moment I nearly lost control of myself. I found them sleeping together. Having

been forewarned by some of my friends in the village, I crept up on them in the middle of the night with a machete in my hand. I raised the machete over my head, ready to strike them both with all my strength. But, by chance, her lover saw me first. Trembling with fear, he raised his hands and pleaded with me to spare his life. He admitted that he had done something terribly wrong. At that very moment the thought arose: ‘He’s admitted his guilt. Don’t do it! Don’t do it! It will only make matters much worse. Nothing good can come out of it.’

“I felt pity for that man who was so terrified of dying, and my anger subsided. I quickly called the other villagers to come and bear witness so that no one would have doubt as to the truth of the situation. In front of the entire assembly, which included the village headman and all of my relatives, I pressed serious charges against my wife’s lover. He responded by publicly confessing everything, and agreed to pay a fine. I then announced for all to hear that I was ceding my wife to her lover.

“Having cut off the urge for revenge, I felt relieved; although I remained deeply dismayed by what happened. I had lost faith in life, and I felt no motivation to pick up the pieces and start my worldly life over again. I thought only of how I wished to become a monk so that I could escape these circumstances and transcend this wretched world. Going beyond the world to attain *Nibbāna* following the Lord Buddha and his *Arahant* disciples was the only course I was willing to contemplate. It was for this reason that I ordained, and it is for this reason that I have practised Dhamma diligently all my life. I became a Bhikkhu in great haste because I was so disgusted and dismayed that it weighed heavily on my heart. Nothing could have stopped me at that time.”

AJAAN KHAO'S ORDINATION took place at Wat Bodhi Sri monastery on May 2, 1919. Phra Khru Phuttisak was his *upajjhāya* and Ajaan Bunjan was his *kammavācariya*. He stayed at Wat Bodhi Sri studying the principles of Dhamma and *Vinaya* for six years. During his stay there, he observed that the conduct of his teachers and his fellow monks was erratic. They were often neglectful in their observance of monastic discipline and unreliable in their practice of meditation. What he saw was contrary to his own pure intentions to ordain solely for the realization of *Magga* and *Phala*. After considering the matter over and over very carefully, he decided to leave the relative security of the monastery to pursue the wandering lifestyle of a *dhutanga* monk. He then made his decision known to the abbot and his family and friends.

### *Entering the Dhutanga Path*

Before leaving his village to practise *Kammaṭṭhāna*, Ajaan Khao received nothing but discouragement from practically everybody he met, both lay people and Bhikkhus alike. All of them said that nowadays it was impossible to attain the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna*; that the era was long past when this could be done; that however rightly and properly one were to practise the way of the Dhamma and *Vinaya*, one would not be able to attain the desired results and reach the goal; that the practice of meditation makes people mad, so whoever wants to go mad should practise it; that if one aspires to be a good person in society, one should not drive oneself mad by

going the way of *Kammaṭṭhāna*; that in this age there are no *Dhutanga Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhus*, except for those who sell magic yantras, mantras, lockets which have magic properties, magic potions for influencing others, ways of making people impervious to bullets and knives, knowledge of auspicious times and astrology. They assured him that as far as finding *Dhutanga Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhus* who actually practise the way of *Dhutanga*, there were none left nowadays. So he must not waste his time and tire himself to no purpose, for to get to a state of ease and happiness in that way was impossible.

These were some of the many obstacles which blocked the path of those who wanted to practise the way of the *Dhutangas* in those days. But Venerable Ajaan Khao was not prepared to listen to any of them, although he did not object or argue with them for it would not have been useful to either side. But deep within himself he considered that:

“These people are not the owners of the Buddhist religion, they are not the owners of the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna*, nor have they any power to make anyone else go mad, so why should I believe what they say. I have faith only in the Lord Buddha, in the Dhamma and in the Sangha of *Sāvaka Arahants* as being truly worthy within the Triple World. Those who spoke, trying to persuade me to stop, so that I would not go the way of *Kammaṭṭhāna* and practise its various methods, are not those who are truly worthy at all. Just by looking at the behaviour and manners they display, one can know whether they are truly wise or simply foolish, and generally what their characters are like. Their objections in wanting to stop me are things which would be a waste of time for me to even consider. So I must now go away to practise the way of *Kammaṭṭhāna* as soon as I

can without considering anything else. I must search for true things which accord with the basic principles of Dhamma that have been handed down to us. I must strive in this way until I reach the absolute limit of my strength and ability. If I should chance to die in the process, then I willingly give my life and entrust myself to the supreme Dhamma.”

As he prepared to set out on his *dhutanga* wanderings, all his fellow Bhikkhus and many lay people gathered in the monastery to see him off. Just before he left he spoke truthfully from his heart to those who had tried to stop him so as to leave no doubt about his intentions, saying:

“When I have gone from here, unless I can teach myself to attain the ultimate level of *citta* and Dhamma I shall not return to show my face amongst you again. I am ready to die for the sake of realising the true nature of Dhamma with clarity and insight, but not for anything else. Please remember what I have said, just in case I have the right characteristics that enable me to return and meet you again. The only likelihood of my meeting you again will be if I realise the true nature of Dhamma with clarity and absolute certainty.”

He said this at a time when many people were gathered there, both highly respected Bhikkhus and the lay people from his village who had faith in them as being very wise and learned monks. And all of them tried to stop him from going away. He remembered:

“At that time my heart seemed so strong it could crush a diamond to powder in an instant. It seemed as if I could leap into the sky and walk about up there for all of them to see. This was probably due to pride and high spirits in my heart — as though it were shining forth brightly for all those people to see,

telling them: ‘See here, the diamond radiance in this heart, can’t you see it? Are you all stupid enough to disparage me, saying that I will go mad by delving into strange things? My heart is not in the same sphere as all of yours, such that you can gather it up into your clan to die worthlessly in the way a dog dies. I am not prepared to die in the way that all of you would lead me towards death right now, for I intend to die in the way that the Lord Buddha taught us – by not leaving any ‘seed’ of becoming remaining whatsoever. I have already died in your way so many countless times that it is impossible to tell in how many cemeteries I have ended my days. But although I may not be able to know this with my own higher knowing faculty, I have faith in the Lord Buddha and his teaching, for his higher knowing faculty was supreme and unequalled.’”

As soon as he was ready, he said farewell and took his leave of all the Bhikkhus and learned people and walked away through a large crowd of lay followers. He then set out for That Phanom<sup>1</sup> on foot through thick forests and jungles, following paths worn by people and buffalo carts; for in those days there were no roads, not even the roughest dirt roads, but only foot paths. Many types of wild animals inhabited the forests. Large numbers of elephants and tigers roamed everywhere, since there were no villages and not as many people about as there are nowadays. Those forests were the original virgin forests, so there was a real danger that if one became lost one would have no food and might die in the forest. Often a person could walk all day without meeting anyone or seeing any sign of habitation.

Venerable Ajaan Khao walked through thick forests until he reached That Phanom. He wanted to find Venerable Ajaan

Mun and study the way of practice with him. Ajaan Khao knew of Ajaan Mun's peerless reputation and was determined to seek him out. He had heard that Ajaan Mun and Ajaan Sao were staying at Tha Bor in Nong Khai province, so from That Phanom he set out walking to Nong Khai, a distance of some 270 miles. Wandering by stages, he reached Nong Khai in several months and went to see Ajaan Mun. He related:

“I was only able to spend a short time training with him before he went away and disappeared into silence. Then I felt a sense of hopelessness for a while because I had no teacher to teach and guide me. Several years later I heard that Venerable Ajaan Mun had gone to stay and practise the way in the Chiang Mai area, so I set out to follow him by wandering in the *Dhutanga Kammaṭṭhāna* way, going along the bank of the Mekong River until I reached the province of Chiang Mai. Then I wandered about in the various districts of Chiang Mai with peace and happiness.”

The places where Ajaan Khao stayed and practised were deep in the forests and hills and far away from any villages. At that time, Venerable Ajaan Mun was also wandering about in the same area, but it was not easy to find him because he always liked to wander alone away from his colleagues; and he would not readily allow others to meet him. Ajaan Khao continued following him relentlessly without success for about a year until he finally gave up hope of ever finding Ajaan Mun and began walking back toward the Northeast region. He walked as far as Lampang where he met Ajaan Waen, whom he had known previously. Ajaan Waen said that he knew where to find Ajaan Mun, so they decided to go together in search of him. They eventually found him at Wat Pa Miang Huay Sai in the Phrao

district of Chiang Mai province. Ajaan Mun preferred to live alone, so Ajaan Khao and Ajaan Waen camped in the mountains nearby and came often to get instructions from him. When the *vassa* period approached, he insisted that Ajaan Khao and Ajaan Waen find another monastery to spend the retreat because the villagers supporting Ajaan Mun's retreat were poor and could not afford to support many monks.

Ajaan Khao said that he always tried to stay close by Venerable Ajaan Mun so that he could go to see him and learn from him when it was necessary. Whenever he approached Ajaan Mun to seek his advice about an aspect of Dhamma, his teacher always had compassion for him and taught him to the utmost of his ability without holding back or hiding anything – but he would never let anybody stay with him. Still, Ajaan Khao said that he was quite content that Ajaan Mun had compassion for him and taught him at those times when it was necessary to go and ask him questions. Once he had cleared up his problems, he paid his respects and left Ajaan Mun to live alone, putting into practise what he had learnt. In this manner, he travelled back and forth quite often.

After living like this for several years, Venerable Ajaan Mun very kindly let him stay with him for the *vassa* period. Ajaan Khao was so glad and so happy when Venerable Ajaan Mun told him the news that he felt as if he could float in the air, for after trying for so many years he had at last succeeded. From then on he stayed regularly with Ajaan Mun during the *vassa*. The practice and development of Ajaan Khao's *citta bhāvanā* (meditation) steadily gained strength after he went to stay in the Chiang Mai region. With a skilled teacher to guide and teach him continually, his heart seemed as though it were

about to leap into the sky — so strong was his happiness and contentment in the Dhamma that arose in his heart. No longer was there any unease or sadness due to his practice being up and down — sometimes progressing and sometimes declining — as happened when he was staying in other places. From day to day his heart steadily progressed, both in *samādhi* and in wisdom, and he became engrossed in striving day and night without ever becoming satiated.

### *A Special Affinity for Elephants*

Once Ajaan Khao was wandering *dhutanga* in the Chiang Mai mountains with Ajaan Mun and Ajaan Mahā Thong Sak. As they reached a narrow gap in the path leading up the mountain, they chanced upon a large, solitary elephant whose owner had released it and then wandered off some place. All they could see there was a gigantic elephant with huge six-foot tusks searching for food — quite a fearsome sight. They conferred among themselves about how to proceed. This was the only path up the mountain, and it allowed no room for going around the elephant. Ajaan Mun told Ajaan Khao to speak with the elephant, which was eating bamboo leaves at the side of the path. Standing about twenty yards away with its back to them, it had yet to notice their approach. Ajaan Khao addressed the elephant:

“Big brother elephant, we wish to speak with you.”

At first, the elephant did not clearly hear his voice, but it did stop chewing the bamboo leaves.

“Big brother elephant, we wish to speak with you.”

Clearly hearing this, the elephant suddenly swung around to face the monks. It stood stock-still, its ears fully extended.

“Big brother elephant, we wish to speak with you. You are so very big and strong. We are just a group of monks, so weak and so very frightened of you, big brother. We would like to walk past where you are standing. Would big brother please move over a bit so that we have room to pass by? If you keep standing there, it really frightens us, so we don’t dare walk past.”

As soon as he finished speaking, the elephant immediately turned to the side and thrust its tusks into the middle of a clump of bamboo, signalling its intention to let them pass unharmed. Seeing it facing the clump of bamboo, Ajaan Mun told the others that they could continue on as it would not bother them now. The two monks invited Ajaan Mun to walk between them, with Ajaan Khao walking in front and Ajaan Mahā Thong Sak following behind. They walked past in single file only six feet from the elephant’s rear end, without incident. But as they were walking away, by chance the hook on Ajaan Mahā Thong Sak’s umbrella got tangled in some bamboo just a few yards past the elephant. It defied all attempts to extricate it, so he was forced to struggle with it for quite some time. Terrified of the elephant – which was now looking right at him – he was soon drenched in sweat. Fighting desperately to disentangle the hook, he glanced up at the eyes of the elephant, which stood there like a huge stuffed animal. He could see that its eyes were bright and clear. In truth, its countenance inspired affection rather than fear, but at that moment his fear remained strong. When he finally did get free, his fear subsided, and he realised

that this elephant was a very endearing animal. Seeing that they were all safely past, Ajaan Khao turned to the elephant.

“Hey, big brother, we’ve all passed by now. Please relax and eat in peace.”

As soon as he finished speaking, the sound of crunching, breaking bamboo filled the air.

Later the monks praised this intelligent elephant, agreeing it was an animal that inspired affection and sympathy. The only faculty it lacked was the ability to speak. Ajaan Mahā Thong Sak was truly amazed how Ajaan Khao was able to speak with the elephant as though it was just another human being: ‘Big brother, your little brothers are frightened and dare not pass. Please make way so that we can go by without fearing big brother.’ As soon as it received that bit of flattery, it was so pleased that it immediately prepared to make way for them.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION, Venerable Ajaan Khao was spending the *vassa* period together with another Bhikkhu. Late one night when it was very quiet, he was sitting in meditation in a small hut. That night a large elephant, whose owner had let it loose to wander in the forest to find its own food, walked slowly towards the back of his hut. Ajaan Khao did not know where it had come from. Right behind his hut was a large boulder blocking the way, so the elephant could not get any closer to him. When it got to the boulder, it stretched its trunk out into the hut until it touched his *klod*<sup>2</sup> and the mosquito net above his head while he was sitting in meditation. The sound of its breathing was loud as it sniffed him, and he felt the coolness of it on his head, while his *klod* and mosquito net swung back and

forth. Meanwhile, Ajaan Khao sat repeating the *parikamma* “Buddho”, putting everything he had into it. Not having anything else to rely upon, he entrusted his heart and life to the genuine “Buddho”.

The large elephant continued to stand there quietly for about two hours, as if it was waiting to catch him when he moved, ready to tear him to pieces. Once in a while he heard its breath sniffing him from outside the mosquito net. When it finally moved, it drew back, walked to the western end of his hut and reached into a basket of sour tamarinds, which lay people had brought Ajaan Khao to clean the lid of his bowl, then started to eat them, making a loud, crunching noise as if they were delicious.

Ajaan Khao thought, “Those tamarinds for cleaning my bowl lid are going to be cleaned out. Soon there will be none left for sure. If the owner of this big belly finishes them off and cannot find any more, it is sure to come into my hut and find me and tear me to bits. So I’d better go out and speak to it and tell it some things that it should know. This animal knows the language of people quite well since it has lived with people for a long time. When I speak to it, it will be more likely to listen to me than to be stubborn and difficult. If it becomes stubborn and belligerent, it will probably kill me. But even if I don’t go out and talk to it, once it has eaten all the tamarinds it’s bound to come this way and find me. If it is going to kill me, there will be no way to escape since it’s late at night and too dark for me to see where I am going.”

Having come to this decision, he left his small hut and stood in front, hiding behind a tree. He started to speak to the elephant, saying:

“Big brother, your small brother would like to say a few words to you, please listen to what I have to say to you now.”

As soon as the elephant heard the sound of his voice, it went completely still and quiet without making a move. Then Ajaan Khao spoke to it in a mild, persuasive manner, saying:

“Big brother, you have been brought up by people who have looked after you at their homes until you have now become fully domesticated. You are thus fully aware of the ways of people, including the language that they speak, which they have used to teach you for many years. You know all these things very well; in fact, you know them even better than some people do. So, big brother, you should also know the customs and laws of people, and you should not just do anything that you feel like doing as it suits your fancy. When you act in ways that are contrary to the ways of human beings, you can easily upset people. Then they may harm you, or, depending on what you do, they may even kill you. People are far more intelligent than all other animals in the world. All animals fear people more than any other species. You, big brother, are in subjection to people, so you should respect their ways, for human beings are more intelligent than you are. If you’re even a little bit stubborn or difficult, they beat you painfully on the head with a hook. If you are very bad, they will probably kill you.

“Please don’t forget what your little brother has taught out of compassion for you. Your little brother is a Bhikkhu, so I will give you the five *sīla*. You should keep them well. Then, when you die, you will go to a state of happiness – at least you should be born as a human being with merit and the virtue of Dhamma in your heart. Should you be born higher than that, you may go to the heaven realms or *Brahmaloka* or higher still.

All of those births are far superior to being born as an animal like an elephant or a horse, which are used to draw carts or to drag logs about while being beaten with whips. Such a life is nothing but torment and trouble that lasts until one dies, without there being any chance to get free from that burden – just like the life you must put up with at present.

“Big brother, please listen carefully and make a true resolve to accept the moral precepts. They are firstly, *Pāṇātipāta*: you must not kill people or animals deliberately by taking advantage of your strength and ability to do so – and also, you must not mistreat or oppress others, whether people or animals. To do such things is to do evil. Secondly, *Adinnādāna*: you must not steal or take for yourself things which belong to others, or which others are keeping for their own use – such as the tamarinds in that basket which big brother was eating just now. They were given to me by people for cleaning the lid of my bowl. But I don’t take offence at this, for I don’t want you to make any evil *kamma* at all. I just mentioned it to show you that it’s something that has an owner. If things such as that are not given to you, you should not eat them, nor should you walk over them, trampling on them and damaging them. Thirdly, *Kāmesu miccācāra*: you must not have sexual intercourse with any animal which already has a mate, for this is wrong. If you have sexual intercourse, it should only be with one who has no mate, for this is not wrongdoing. Fourthly, *Musāvāda*: you must not lie or deceive. Let your actions and your behaviour be true and straightforward, not deceitful in such a way that they give a wrong impression or fool others. That is also wrong and evil. Fifthly, *Surā meraya majja pamādaṭṭhāna*: you must not

consume anything which causes intoxication or drunkenness, such as alcoholic liquors. To do so is wrong and evil.

“You must keep these precepts, for if you don’t you can fall into hell when you die. There you will have to put up with great suffering for long periods of time — perhaps for aeons — before you reach the end of the *kamma* that led you to hell and you can rise out of it. But even after getting free from hell, there will still be some remainder of your evil *kamma* which will lead you to life after life as a ghost, a demon or an animal. In those births you will still suffer the results of the evil *kamma* you made. Only then will you be able to take birth as a human being — a birth very difficult to attain because of the bad *kamma* which oppresses you and holds you down.

“So big brother, you must remember well what I have said and practice what I have taught you. Then you will get free from life as an animal and be born as a human being or a *Devatā* in your next life for sure. That is all I have to teach you now. I hope that big brother will be glad to do these things. Now you may go find a place to rest or something to eat as you wish. Your younger brother will now go and practise his meditation. He will share some of his virtue with you and spread out *mettā* to his big brother so that you will never be lacking in happiness. Now, big brother, it is time for you to go elsewhere.”

It was most remarkable that for the whole of the time that he was teaching it, that large elephant stood absolutely still, as though it were made of rock. It did not fidget or move at all, but stood motionless until he had finished speaking. Then, as soon as he had given the *sīla* with his blessings and told it to go, it began to move its huge body, making a noise like an

earthquake while it drew back, turned around and went off. It walked away in a deliberate, thoughtful manner, as if it truly understood everything it had heard.

Thinking about this incident I cannot help feeling a lot of sympathy for one whose body was that of an animal, but whose heart was that of a human being, able to appreciate the teaching on good and evil that it received without being obstinate or arrogant, as one might expect from such a large and strong animal. In fact, it was very mild-mannered and appeared to appreciate the moral teaching throughout – and as soon as Ajaan Khao told it to go, it immediately turned around and went away. While listening to his teaching, it listened so attentively that it almost stopped breathing, just like those who listen to a Dhamma talk given by Bhikkhus should – with full respect for Dhamma.

Ajaan Khao was amazing as well. He was so skilled in his speech and his choice of words that even human beings would have been enraptured and carried away by his talk, much less an animal like an elephant. He used the most sweet and honeyed language with such skill that it would be rare to find anyone else who could do this, and equally rare to listen to it. So the elephant listened with rapt attention, not fidgeting or even moving its ears until he had finished giving his Dhamma talk. When he told it to go away, it obeyed and went to find something to eat in the manner of an unusually noble animal.

The whole incident makes one reflect even more deeply how if something is experienced that brings satisfaction, whether to a human or animal, that tends to make their hearing clear and lucid and their sight bright, as though night becomes day. The heart is absorbed with *pīti* – satisfaction and joyful gladness –

while listening to the enchanting words of the teaching, which are always desirable and of which one can never have enough, because they are things that are greatly valued by the heart.

Venerable Ajaan Khao continued to flatter the big elephant for quite a long time, until it became fascinated and mesmerised by the sweet, gentle words which resonated deep inside — for example:

“Big brother, you are very strong, whereas I am small and my strength cannot compare with yours — so I feel afraid of you.”

Such flattery being one of the most powerful ways of enchantment, he talked like this until the great elephant went into a trance while standing there, oblivious to everything else. It would even have been glad to disgorge the sour tamarinds that it had swallowed, to put them back in the basket for its charming little brother, without keeping even the taste of them. For this act was a disgrace to the dignity of an intelligent and noble elephant — a walking store of virtue. Once its belly was full of Ajaan Khao’s teachings, it went off to find food and never again came to bother him throughout the rest of the *vassa* period. It’s quite remarkable that the heart of an animal can have so much understanding.

After the *vassa* Ajaan Khao left that place, wandering wherever he felt it was good to go for the purpose of practising the way of Dhamma ever higher and higher.

VENERABLE AJAAN KHAO was an earnest *Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhu* who possessed a resolute and courageous character — whatever he did, he did truly. When he was staying in the hills, he got

the lay supporters to make up three paths for walking *caṅkama*. The first one he used for paying homage (*pūjā*) to the Lord Buddha, the second to the Dhamma and the third to the *Sāvaka Sangha* of the Lord. He walked *caṅkama* on these three paths at different times of the day according to a fixed schedule which he kept to quite strictly. As soon as he had finished his meal in the morning, he walked *caṅkama* on the first path paying homage to the Buddha, and continued walking until about midday. At two o'clock in the afternoon, he started walking on the path dedicated to the Dhamma and continued walking until 4 p.m., when it was time to sweep the grounds and bathe. When he had finished doing all his duties, he started to walk *caṅkama* on the path reserved for paying homage to the Sangha. He continued walking until 10 or 11 p.m., after which he rested, sitting in meditation for a while before lying down to sleep. As soon as he woke up he would begin his *samādhi* meditation practice again. This lasted until dawn, when he walked *caṅkama* until it was time for him to go on *piṇḍapāta*.

Some nights he would sit in meditation practice the whole night, not getting up from his seat until dawn. Normally when he sat in *samādhi* meditation, his heart was very bright after he had finished. But at those times when he sat all night in meditation, the material world disappeared entirely from his awareness, and even his physical body seemed to have gone as well. It was altogether a most remarkable and wonderful thing right from the time that he sat down to examine painful feeling (*dukkha vedanā*) until it died away and ceased due to his examination of the pain, which took his *citta* deep into a subtle and intimate state of calm. At that point, the only thing apparent to him was 'knowing', just this alone. This

brought him a calm and happiness so subtle and gentle that it was quite indescribable. There were no supporting conditions (*ārammaṇa*), however subtle, present in the *citta*. This means that the elements of existence (*loka dhātu*) disappeared simultaneously with the disappearance of the supporting conditions. This state remained until the *citta* withdrew from it, after which the supporting conditions that are the usual companions of the *citta* gradually returned, bit by bit. Afterwards he would continue working at his practice in the normal way.

When the *citta* has integrated and gone down into a state of calm, it may remain in that state for several hours, but there is no feeling of it being a long time such as it might normally appear to be. This must surely be the state of *eka citta, eka dhamma*<sup>3</sup> just within the heart alone, without there being anything else to form a duality. Only when withdrawing from that state is it possible to know that the *citta* integrated into a state of calm and remained there for so long, for so many hours. On those nights when his meditation practice went smoothly and attained calm easily, even if he sat the whole night through, it seemed like he had only been sitting for two or three hours. There were simply no hindrances to oppress him.

VENERABLE AJAAN KHAO tended to encounter dangerous situations in connection with elephants more than any other animals. Soon after the previous encounter, he met another large elephant in the Mae Pang district of Lampang Province — and this time he was almost unable to save himself. This one was a true wild, forest elephant and not one that had lived with and been looked after by people, like the previous one.

It was at night and Ajaan Khao was walking *caṅkama* when he heard the sound of an elephant crashing through the jungle breaking branches and making a lot of noise. It was rushing towards him, getting closer every minute, and there was no time for him to run away from it. Then he remembered how forest elephants are usually afraid of fire. So he quickly left the *caṅkama* path and went to get all his remaining candles from the place where he was staying. He then stuck them into the ground all along the sides of his *caṅkama* path and lit them as fast as he could. To any person who saw it, this would be a beautiful, peaceful sight, but it is hard to say how an elephant will react to it. By the time he had finished setting up the candles, the elephant was almost upon him, giving him no possible way of escape. All he could do was to set up a ‘true resolve’ (*sacca adhiṭṭhāna*) that the supernatural power of the Lord Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha might come to help and protect him, a servant of the Lord Buddha, against this huge elephant. By that time the elephant had arrived. Stopping about two meters away from him at one side of his *caṅkama* path, it stood there without moving, its ears spread out. It was clearly visible in the candle light, its huge body appearing as large as a hill.

Meanwhile, Ajaan Khao started walking *caṅkama*, pacing back and forth as if he was not concerned about the elephant at all – although in fact he was so afraid of it that he could hardly breathe. When he first saw it charging towards him, so strong and aggressive, he focused his attention solely on “Buddho” and held on to it tenaciously as the guarantor of his safety. Apart from that, he thought of nothing else. He did not even let his thoughts go out to the giant elephant as large as a hill which had come to stand by the side of his *caṅkama* path, for he was

afraid that his *citta* might slip from “Buddho”, which was his best refuge at that time. “Buddho” and the *citta* then became one and the same thing until the heart lost all fear and there remained just ‘knowing’ and the repetition of “Buddho” which were blended into one.

Meanwhile, the elephant just stood there like a mountain, looking at him without fidgeting or moving, its ears spread wide as if to indicate that it was not ready to accept any friendly advances. This accorded with the manner in which it charged towards Ajaan Khao when it first approached him, coming straight for him without hesitating. It acted as though it intended to crush him to death – but when it reached him it just stood there like a lifeless dummy.

As soon as the *citta* and “Buddho” went inward and came together, becoming one and the same thing, Ajaan Khao lost all fear. In fact, he felt positively bold and daring, confident that he could have walked right up to the elephant without the least feeling of fear. Having thought about it, he realised that to walk right up to such a wild jungle animal would be an act of carelessness based on conceit, which he shouldn’t do. So he kept on fearlessly walking *caṅkama* in competition with the standing elephant, as though nothing could happen that would be any danger to him.

The elephant must have stood there for about an hour, by which time the candles were almost finished. Some had already gone out and the rest would not last much longer when the elephant backed away, turned round and walked off by the way it had come. It then went looking for food in the forest around that area, where it could be heard breaking branches and treading on dead wood, making a lot of noise.

This was the first time that Venerable Ajaan Khao saw for himself the extraordinary power of the *citta* and “Buddho”. He was faced with a critical situation without any way to escape or hide, so there was no alternative but to face up to it using these methods – if he died it would be only because there was no way to avoid it. This experience made him fully confident that no matter what happened, if the *citta* and “Buddho” became intimately blended together in a natural way, nothing could possibly do any harm to him. He said that he became absolutely convinced of this and has remained so ever since.

It was also very strange how the elephant, instead of becoming wild and violent when it reached him, just stood there quite calmly, its ears spread wide as it watched him walking in meditation without getting tired of it. Once it had seen enough, it drew back, turned round and went on its way searching for food in a manner that showed its stomach had lost all its former aggression.

One cannot help but feel more sympathy for this elephant than for the previous one, which was a domesticated animal that knew the language of people quite well. But this elephant had been a wild animal living in the forest since birth – and it must have been over a hundred years old by then. As it was most unlikely that this one knew the language of people, Ajaan Khao did not speak to it at all. Instead, he simply continued walking *caṅkama*. Unlike the first elephant, this one did not have a halter around its neck. The villagers later told him that it was a wild elephant that had been the leader of a herd for a long time. Why it should have been wandering about on its own at that time nobody could say – perhaps it just left the herd for a short time.

Even after the elephant had gone, Ajaan Khao continued walking *caṅkama* with an amazing feeling in his heart as he realised the value of that elephant, which had come to help his *citta* to see the wonderful nature of Dhamma in connection with fear and fearlessness. It enabled him to understand it with absolute clarity, leaving no room for any doubt at all. For that reason, it would not be wrong to look on this elephant as being something created by the *Devas* for his benefit. Normally, forest elephants are not used to people, nor do they act peacefully towards them. Only when they are truly overpowered and cannot attack do they quickly flee and try to escape to save themselves.

“But this one came walking straight towards me of its own free will. With its eyes wide open, it came right up close, well within the light of the candles that I had set in place. But it did not squash me or tear me to pieces; nor was it startled and frightened by the fire of the candles, for it did not run away into the forest to save itself from the fire. Instead, after walking up to me in a bold, imposing manner, like it was the ‘boss’, it just stood there for over an hour, appearing neither aggressive nor afraid. After that, it simply went away. This is what made me think about that animal with amazement, so much so that I have not forgotten it to this day.

“Because my heart had full faith in Dhamma from then on, no matter where I wandered or where I lived, I was never afraid. As it says in the *Dhammapāda*: ‘Dhamma guards those who practise the way’ – Dhamma never lets them die, buried in mud or water like an old log of wood.

“Knowledge of the *citta* and Dhamma that truly reaches the heart is most likely to be found at those times when we are

in a critical situation. When a situation is not really critical, the *citta* tends to act up and become agitated by endless kinds of *kilesas* – so much so that we can hardly keep up with them. In fact, we are likely to let them inundate us even though we see them in full view. It's as if we are unable to restrain the *kilesas*, or even keep pace with them long enough to deal with them effectively. But when the situation is truly critical so that we are actually driven into a corner, the *citta* and Dhamma become strengthened – though where the strength comes from is hard to say. The heart then bows down and submits, putting its faith in Dhamma without resisting. Then, when we decide to focus it on any aspect of Dhamma, it stays right there without balking. This is probably due to the fear of dying, which might well happen if the *citta* were uncooperative. So the *citta* becomes compliant and 'easy to teach', thus losing its stubbornness at such times.

“This is probably the reason why *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhus* like going into the forests and hills; even though they are quite afraid of death, and one part of their hearts does not want to go to such places. My *citta* was like that. I cannot speak for other people's hearts, but if they are determined and fully committed to training themselves so as to get to the causes and reach the results of the way of truth, it should be much the same for them as well. The *citta* is the dwelling place of both Dhamma and the *kilesas*, factors that can make people feel either full of courage or full of fear, full of goodness or full of evil. Training in accordance with the right causes brings those results which are the purpose and aim of Dhamma. Such training is able to make all the various kinds of *kilesas* surren-

der and vanish until they have all gone without leaving any trace or seed that could grow again.

“For myself, I have a rather coarse and rough character, so I tend to have confidence in the strict discipline and rough methods that enable me to counteract those gross natural tendencies within me called the *kilesas*. Like that time when the large elephant came walking up to me while I was walking *caṅkama*. That was a time when I clearly saw the *kilesas* as well as the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha within my heart. Normally, the heart which is dominated by the *kilesas* is very difficult to discipline and train. Sometimes, those who set out to destroy their *kilesas* end up dying before they succeed in doing so. That is because of the mean tenacity of the *āsavas*<sup>4</sup> which have been feeding on our hearts for many ages. But as soon as I got to the point where there was no escape — when that great elephant came to help me — the most stubborn *kilesas*, the ones which had been so clever at resisting my efforts, all went into hiding — though where they went I don’t know. Then it became easy to instruct the heart. When I ordered the heart to remain fixed to an aspect of Dhamma, it immediately agreed and did so. It was as if oil had been put in the machinery so that there was virtually no friction as there had been before.

“As soon as the *kilesas* left the heart, the Dhamma, which was already developed and just waiting there, arose at the same moment and shone forth brightly. Simultaneously, courage and fearlessness towards everything immediately arose within the heart. All those things that I had sought for so long were there for me to see and admire to my hearts content. Meanwhile, the fear of death had disappeared — where to I don’t know, but it enabled me to see quite clearly that fear is a *kilesa* which

has always asserted control over my heart. As soon as the fear that was oppressing and deceiving my heart disappeared – even though it may not have disappeared entirely – I saw quite clearly at that moment how baneful a thing it is. After that, whenever fear arose, as it did at times, I knew that what I experienced then was enough to remind me that: ‘This fear is not my friend, but an enemy who has come in the guise of a friend.’ It could no longer make my heart have confidence in it as before. I resolved that throughout my life of striving for Dhamma I will endeavour to drive it out every time it arises, until the essential nature of this enemy posing as a friend has entirely disappeared from my heart. Only then can I relax and be happy and free of all kinds of concerns and anxieties.

“It seems to me that if we take refuge in Dhamma, take real interest in Dhamma, love and attend closely to Dhamma and practise it truly in the way that the Buddha proclaimed it to us with complete certainty and true *mettā*, then the realisation of Dhamma at its various levels will no longer be beyond our reach. Certainly we will be able to experience Dhamma naturally, in the same way that they realised it at the time of the Lord Buddha.

“The reason why the present age and its people are so different from those at the time of the Lord Buddha, in so far as the ways of the path and its fruition are concerned, is that we ourselves act in ways that oppose our own development by merely wanting results without being interested in their causes, that is, whether we are practising rightly or wrongly. In truth, we should be adjusting and altering our actions of body, speech and mind to make them conform to Dhamma – which is the way of action leading to the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna*. If we

constantly examine and test ourselves against the standard of Dhamma for the purpose of attaining whatever we have set our hearts on, we will at least succeed in attaining that purpose to our satisfaction, so long as our mindfulness and wisdom are strong enough. Whether in the time of the Lord Buddha or in our present age, the *kilesas* must be corrected and got rid of by means of Dhamma. It's comparable to diseases that have been prevalent in all ages — they can all be cured by using the right remedy. I have had faith in this for a long time, and the longer I go on practising, the deeper it becomes buried in my heart, until nothing can remove it.”

### *Ajaan Mun's Ascetic Path*

Ajaan Khao always vividly remembered the words that Venerable Ajaan Mun spoke when they stayed together, for they had penetrated deep into his heart. His unshakeable faith in Ajaan Mun grew deeper and deeper until it became one with his heart. Ajaan Mun taught him the true way of practice in this way:

“When watching the *kilesas* and searching for Dhamma, no one should overlook the heart, which is the place where the *kilesas* and Dhamma all dwell. Both the *kilesas* and Dhamma are to be found only in the heart and not elsewhere in any time or place whatsoever. They arise in the heart, develop in the heart and die away in the heart — which is the one who knows them. Trying to cure the *kilesas* or search for Dhamma in other places

is useless. Even if you were to spend the rest of your life doing so, you would never come across them as they truly are. Even after dying and being reborn many times, you would still come across only *kilesas* that have arisen from the heart, and experience the discontent and suffering that comes from them. By searching for Dhamma in the heart, you will gradually start to find it. It will then increase steadily, depending on the intensity with which you strive for it. Time and place are merely conditions which can promote or suppress the *kilesas* and Dhamma, causing them to develop or deteriorate accordingly.

“Thus, for instance, forms and sounds are conditions which promote the *kilesas* that are already in the heart, causing them to develop and increase. On the other hand, going to practise meditation in the hills and forests is done for the purpose of promoting the Dhamma that dwells in the heart, causing it to greatly increase.

“The real *kilesas* and Dhamma are within the heart, whereas the conditions that increase or suppress them are to be found everywhere, both internally and externally. That is why the *ajāans* teach their followers to avoid enticing things which are disturbing to the heart, things that tend to make those *kilesas* within their hearts become more audacious — such as the many things experienced through the senses. In addition, they also teach their followers to wander in mountains and forests so they can live in peaceful solitude. There they can much more easily practise the way and so gradually eliminate their *kilesas*, thus diminishing the round of birth and death (*vatta*) within their hearts by using these methods.

“For this reason, finding a suitable place for the purpose of striving to practise the way is very important — it is the right

method for one who is ordained and hopes to attain freedom from *dukkha* in his heart. This follows the basic principles of the Dhamma that the Lord Buddha formulated for his followers after he saw clearly for himself what things were dangers to their purpose. By staying at times in ordinary places and at other times in unusual and lonely places, your attitude towards the place where you are staying is always changing, so you don't become too complacent. But when you stay a long time in one place, the *citta* becomes overly familiar with that place. Those who are reflective and watchful of themselves will know immediately when this happens, so they will quickly change and move to another place so as to find the right conditions to prevent themselves from relaxing to the point of carelessness. Complacency gives the *kilesas* an opportunity to muster their strength and thus bring about your ruin without you being aware of what is happening. But when you correct the situation right away, without being careless or indifferent to it, the *kilesas* are not likely to have any chance to build up enough strength to ruin the *citta* and the Dhamma within it. You are then able to move forward without deteriorating.

“Those who train themselves to recognize what is dangerous must have mindfulness continually present in the heart, reflecting and knowing in the present without slipping away into forgetful indulgence. By not slipping into forgetful indulgence, you create a protective barrier against many kinds of *kilesas* which have not yet arisen, thus giving them no opportunity to arise. As for the *kilesas* that are still there — those that have yet to be entirely cured — it prevents them from becoming more troublesome and arrogant. It also encourages you to get

rid of them using unrelenting mindfulness, wisdom, faith and effort.

“If your mindfulness is strong, then any place which instils fear in the *citta* becomes a charnel ground for the cremation of all the *kilesas* by means of the ascetic Dhamma<sup>5</sup>, that is, effort that has mindfulness and wisdom as the means of burning the *kilesas* to destruction. The *jhānas*, *samādhi*, *paññā* (wisdom) and *vimutti* (liberation), will all be absolutely clear to the heart in that place where you practise in the right way. Whether it’s the *kilesas* losing their power, or the *kilesas* dying away steadily, or the *kilesas* being entirely eliminated, it will happen in the heart, aided by a place which is well suited to someone who strives with zeal in everything in all ways. Other than the heart, there is no other place where all the *kilesas* arise and cease. This one must keep in mind and take to heart: *The place where Dhamma thrives is where the kilesas will decline and die away entirely. What we call ‘the place’, those who practise the way should always know, is in the ‘heart’ alone and nowhere else.*

“Therefore, you should struggle to cut the *kilesas* to pieces and destroy them without fear or favour on the battlefield – which is the heart – while depending on a suitable environment as a supporting condition to enable you to be victorious, to gain salvation and to reach the highest point of human attainment by the persistence of your own striving. You must not go astray and be uncertain of the way, thinking that the *kilesas* and the great mass of your own *dukkha* are to be found anywhere else but within the sphere of the heart.

“From the first beginnings my own practice – which was rather haphazard because I had no teacher who could teach and train me properly – until I became a teacher myself with

my own followers, I have never seen this mass of *dukkha* anywhere but in the heart. Nor have I ever seen any unimaginably strange or truly wonderful things in any other place except the heart, which is the abode of Dhamma, and all the *kilesas* as well. *It is Dukkha and Samudaya, which also exist in the heart of each one of us, that exercise such great power over everything in the three worlds. For they are able to completely block the way which leads to the Path, Fruition and Nibbāna.* Considering the means, or ‘tools’, for digging out and clearing away *dukkha* and its cause so that the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* may be clearly revealed, nothing in the three worlds is able to accomplish this better than *Nirodha*<sup>6</sup> and *Magga*, which also exist within the same heart. Just these Four Noble Truths tell the whole story.

“You must not long for other times, places or people, for this is a danger that wastes a lot of time and slows your development without being of any value at all. Thinking like this, rather than thinking about the *kilesas* and Dhamma within your heart, contradicts the purpose and aim of the Great Teacher — the Lord Buddha — who bestowed his Dhamma teaching on the world — a teaching which is correct and suitable in all respects at all times.”

That, in essence, was the teaching which Venerable Ajaan Mun taught Ajaan Khao in a fully reasoned way while was living with him in Chiang Mai province. Ajaan Khao always remembered it quite clearly, for it was buried in his heart with no room for doubt.

Sometimes Ajaan Khao had questions which, when he asked them, Ajaan Mun would admonish him for casually asking questions without having first considered the principles

of Dhamma to see in which direction the truth lies. One such question he asked was:

“At the time of the Lord Buddha, according to his biography and other writings, large numbers of people attained the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna*, and quickly as well. Far more people attained then than nowadays, for few people manage to get there now. Also, those who do attain nowadays seem to do so much slower.”

Venerable Ajaan Mun immediately asked him: “How do you know that there are hardly any who attain the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* nowadays, and that those who do, do so much more slowly?”

Ajaan Khao replied: “Well, I have never heard of people attaining *Nibbāna* like they used to in those days. According to what is written in the old books, many attained *Nibbāna* simultaneously each time the Lord Buddha gave them a talk on Dhamma, and many others did so soon afterward when they went out to practise the way on their own. It seems that they attained very quickly and easily, making it a joy to read about their attainments. But nowadays, people strive until they almost die without seeing the type of results which one feels should come from such effort – which causes those who practise to become discouraged and undermines their efforts.”

Venerable Ajaan Mun then asked him: “In the old books, does it say that all those who practised the way in those days attained quickly and easily? Or were there also those who practised the way with difficulty, some of them gaining understanding slowly and some quickly, as well as those who practised the way easily, some gaining understanding slowly and some quickly? Such things depend on people’s inherent levels of un-

derstanding and their basic temperaments, which vary greatly with different types of people.”

Ajaan Khao answered, saying: “Yes, they did vary quite considerably, and they certainly did not all attain quickly and easily. There were those who practised with difficulty, some of whom attained slowly and some quickly. But I still feel that it was very different from the situation nowadays, even though people differed in the same way then as they do now.”

Venerable Ajaan Mun then explained: “This difference comes from the teachers and how correctly and precisely they can lead the way. There is also a great discrepancy between the power of the virtuous characteristics (*vāsanā*) of the Lord Buddha and the *Sāvakas* who followed the Buddha and that of people today – the difference is almost beyond comparison. In addition, the interest that people have in Dhamma nowadays is so different from the time of the Lord Buddha. Even the characteristics of people that are derived from their background in this life are very different today from what they were back then. So when there are all these differences, it’s hardly possible that the results will be the same.

“But there is no need for us to talk about other people of other ages, which would take a very long time and be tiresome. In ourselves we display a coarseness that disturbs us all the time, even though we are ordained monks who believe that we strive diligently when we walk *caṅkama* and sit in *samādhi bhāvanā*. These, though, are just bodily activities. The heart, on the other hand, is not striving in any way that corresponds to these activities at all. All it does is think in ways that accumulate the *kilesas* and cause disturbance, while all along we believe that we are striving by means of these activities. When this is

the case, the result is bound to disturb and trouble the heart regardless of when or where we are. Thus we conclude that, although striving to our utmost, we have not gained the results which we should have. But, in fact, while walking *caṅkama* and sitting in *samādhi* we have been accumulating harmful poisons without our being in the least aware of it. This is how we fail to strive truly and properly as it should be done.

“So, there is really no comparison between the time of the Lord Buddha – when their striving was genuine and truly concerned with gaining freedom from *dukkha* –and this present age when we merely play, like children with their toys. In fact, the more we try to make comparisons, the more we show off our *kilesas* and our incompetence. For myself, even though I live in this age of insincerity and deceit, I do not agree with you criticising the Buddhist religion, and yourself, as you did just now. If you still see that you have some virtue and truth left within you, you should try to act in accordance with the plan of action that the Lord Buddha taught so rightly. Avoid the plan of action of the *kilesas* that leads you along their way in everything you do, all the time and every day – even while you believe that you are actually striving in the way of Dhamma. The Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* are universal treasures that the Lord Buddha said may be acquired by anybody. They are treasures that you will realise to your complete satisfaction one day for sure, so long as you do not keep thinking how difficult it is and how slow your attainment comes – which are nothing but obstacles in your way.

“When we practise by striving like someone who feels, due to a weak, half-hearted resolve, that his body will break apart if he continues, we are like lazy inconsequential fools who think

they can bore a hole through a mountain using a small auger – and they are very anxious to do this within the time of a single day. It is so ludicrous that those who really do strive with sharp wisdom just laugh at it. We should consider the manner of striving of those who were Sons of the *Sākya* – the *Sāvaka* disciples of the Buddha himself – to see how they acted. Then compare that with our own striving, which is like someone going to the shore just to smack the sea with his hand – it’s enough to make one disheartened seeing that his desire for *Nibbāna* extends only to getting his hands wet! Think about how the *kilesas* are like an ocean and the efforts we make are like the water on our hands – how far apart are they? People in this age of just ‘wetting their hands in the ocean’ make little in the way of effort, yet their intention is to get free from the realm of *samsāra*. When this does not happen as they expect it to, they find some excuse to blame the religion, or the time, or the place and the people of this or that age. They are not in the least ashamed of the way they display their own incompetence and stupidity, which causes those *ajans* who are truly wise and skilled to feel disheartened and to laugh wryly, saying that there is no way in which they can do anything about such people.

“To invest only a small amount of capital in a useless manner, and then to expect the most enormous returns on one’s investment, is the way of an incompetent fool who builds his own charnel ground for cremating himself and remains engulfed in the flaming mass of his own *dukkha*. The round of *samsāra* never weakens its hold on him, so he never has a chance to get free from it.

“The question that you asked me – which was in effect praising the teaching of Buddhism and praising the age, the

place and the people at the time of the Lord Buddha, while at the same time criticising the teaching, the age, the place and people nowadays – were the words of praise and blame of an incompetent fool who puts obstructions in his own path until he cannot find a way to crawl out to safety. It was the question of someone who is incompetent, the question of someone who puts thorns in his own path to obstruct himself. It was not a question designed to clear the way of obstacles so that you can move forward confidently with an interest in freeing yourself from the *kilesas* by means of the *Svākkhāta* Dhamma – the well-taught Dhamma – which is the ‘middle way’ that was given impartially to all those beings in the world who have enough interest to practise the way rightly.

“If you only had the mindfulness and wisdom to shed all these things from yourself, you would be worthy of some admiration. It’s like various kinds of diseases which people get: if people take the right remedy to make them feel better, then the cure is likely to be effective. But if they are not interested in looking after themselves and treating the disease, it will probably get worse and could even become dangerous – except for minor complaints such as the common cold or minor skin troubles that cure themselves without special attention.

“The ‘*kilesa*’ diseases, which are not in the class of self-healing minor ailments, must be treated with the right medicine. That medicine is the Dhamma-way of striving following the pattern which the Sons of the *Sākya* practised. You can be fully confident that this remedy will quell and get rid of all the *kilesas*, however strong they may be. If you were to think in this way, I could feel more at ease about you. I could admire you as someone who shows cleverness in his thinking; as someone

who has confidence in his own ability to pass beyond the realm of *samsāra*; as someone who has faith in the ability of the Lord Buddha and his religious Teaching, faith that he penetrated Dhamma with his intuitive ability and then spread it abroad as the *Sāsana dhamma* in a proper manner. For his Teaching was a ‘Dhamma of Salvation’ (*Niyyānika dhamma*), truly able to lead beings to freedom.

“So don’t blame and criticise yourself, saying that your *kilesas* are so thick that you can only learn Dhamma slowly, while at the same time having no interest in curing them. Don’t blame the Lord Buddha, saying that he did not formulate and teach Dhamma in a way that was equally suitable for his own time and for all other ages. Don’t blame the Dhamma, saying that it is incapable, or not penetrating enough, to cure the *kilesas* of beings in this modern age in the way it did at the time of the Lord Buddha.

“I am not denying the fact that the strength of people’s *kilesas* is different from what it used to be, and I agree that people at the time of the Lord Buddha had far less of them than people do nowadays. The mode of teaching was also very different from what it is today, as were the teachers, who were mostly ‘seers’ with great understanding and true seeing. The Great Teacher was the Leader of the *Sāvakas* in formulating and teaching Dhamma to his followers and others. Therefore, the teaching was never wrong and never deviated from the truth, for it came straight from the heart of the Lord and from the hearts of his followers, which were completely purified. From this purity of heart they proclaimed the Dhamma, teaching others in language that was fresh and direct without anything hidden or anything mixed in that was wrong or distorted.

“Those who listened to this Dhamma were intent on the truth. They fully committed themselves to it. So the situation was entirely suitable for both teacher and pupil. And so the results came stage by stage. Being self-evident, they fulfilled the expectations of those people who were looking for truth. Because of that, they encountered no problems which could interfere with their development. It was for this reason that in those days many people attained *Magga* and *Phala* each time the Great Teacher or his *Sāvaka* disciples gave Dhamma teachings – whereas nowadays hardly anybody can attain. It’s as though somehow people are no longer people and Dhamma is no longer Dhamma, so no results come from the practice. But in fact, people are people and Dhamma is Dhamma, as they always were. But people are not interested in Dhamma now, so the Dhamma that enters them does not reach the heart. As a result, people remain just people and Dhamma remains just Dhamma, which is not likely to be of much use in bringing about the final attainment. Even if a large number of people listened to an exposition of the whole *Ti-piṭaka*, it would be merely like pouring water on a dog’s back – the dog immediately shakes it all off until there is none left. In a similar way, the Dhamma has no meaning in the hearts of people, much as water is of no consequence on the back of a dog.”

Venerable Ajaan Mun then asked Ajaan Khao: “When you asked that question just now, was your heart like a dog’s back? Or what was it like that you blindly placed blame only on the Dhamma, saying that it had not brought you the results of the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* the same easy way it did in the time of the Lord Buddha. Why don’t you think about your own heart, which is shaking off the Dhamma from itself

faster than a dog can shake water off its back? If you'll only reflect back and consider your own faults and failings, some Dhamma may find a place to seep into your heart and remain there. Then it won't simply flow through it like water flowing down a channel without any reservoir to store it – which is how you are at present.

“The nature of people's *kilesas* at the time of the Lord Buddha was a matter of their own virtue and merit, a fact which should not affect us or make difficulties for us nowadays. People today have their own *kilesas* of various kinds which create trouble for them until there is hardly anywhere in the world where they can live normally. If people don't have enough interest in curing their *kilesas* so that they gain some freedom from the 'fire' with which they 'burn' each other by always criticizing one another, then it won't matter at all what age they live in. The same holds true for those who have no interest in directing their criticisms towards themselves – towards the one who is creating the 'fire' to 'burn' himself and cause all sorts of trouble to others now – in the present. Turning criticism towards yourself is a way of exorcising the fires of lust, hate and delusion – at least to the extent of finding a way to gain some degree of calm and happiness, so that you are not roasted by these fires beyond your endurance. This is the way it should be with human beings, who are far more clever than any other species in the world.”

Ajaan Khao later explained the affect that Venerable Ajaan Mun's forceful admonitions had on him:

“Venerable Ajaan Mun used to scold me quite fiercely for asking questions which had no practical solution, although I

didn't ask such questions very often. But when Venerable Ajaan Mun responded to these questions by treating them as if they were thorns and splinters obstructing the *Sāsana*, I felt that it forced me to see my own faults. I would feel uneasy about it for many days, even though I actually had no doubt that people nowadays could practise Dhamma. But Ajaan Mun would still scold me, 'shredding' me with his fierce language, which I reckon was right and suitable for someone like me who was always talking and so couldn't be quiet and contented. On the other hand, it was also quite beneficial because I was able to hear a Dhamma teaching that went straight to my heart.

“Actually, what I have just told you is no more than a fraction of the deep, spirited and fiery Dhamma which he delivered; for his Dhamma was deeper than the ocean and more fiery than the fires of hell. He also brought up the questions I had asked him in the past to stir me up time after time. Sometimes he did this right in the middle of a meeting when all the other Bhikkhus were gathered there to hear him speak. He would reveal my evil ways, talking about my wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*) and likening me to a *Devadatta* destroying the *Sāsana*. He would tear me into pieces, until there was nothing good left, going on like that for a long time without letting up, until some of the other Bhikkhus began to wonder about it. Afterwards, they would come to ask me whether what Ajaan Mun said was true. I had to explain how the questions I asked were not a true indication of my attitude, but that it was just a method of getting him to speak about Dhamma. Normally, if nobody asked him strange and unusual questions, he did not speak Dhamma like that. But I suppose I was rather stupid in my choice of questions, for I jumped in with both feet and gave

him the hammer to hit me. Maybe I should have asked more normal and less inflammatory questions so that I could listen to Dhamma that was more sweet and soothing.”

Generally speaking, it was as Ajaan Khao said: when Venerable Ajaan Mun was asked questions that were not in any way strange or unusual, he simply answered in a normal way. Even though it was still Dhamma, his way of speaking was smooth and normal so it made no lasting impression on one’s heart. But when asked a strange, unusual question, he became quite animated, and the import of the Dhamma which he brought forth was truly satisfying — as was already described in the “Biography of Venerable Ajaan Mun”.

In truth, Ajaan Mun had no doubts about Ajaan Khao’s views, although the way he scolded him made it appear as though he was doubtful. It was merely the way of a skilled *ajaan* teaching Dhamma. He often changed his attitude and his style of teaching in order to arouse those who were listening, making them ponder his teachings in a way that they would remember for a long time. Otherwise, they might remain complacent, clinging to their own stupidity with no interest in thinking about anything — like a frog sitting and looking at a lotus flower without any purpose. But as soon as Ajaan Mun ‘rapped them on the head with his knuckles’, it was as though their ears and eyes became brighter. Those *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhus* who followed Venerable Ajaan Mun liked being stirred up and rapped on the head frequently to hold their attention and make them think.

When he simply talked in a smooth and even manner, they would listen quiescently, there being nothing to arouse

and catch the heart to make it excited, concerned and a bit frightened. Their hearts then tended to go to sleep internally when there was no method capable of making their minds active and thoughtful. Then those *kilesas* that were waiting to take over were likely to find an opportunity to escape and go about distracting their attention and causing trouble, because the method of teaching was not equal to the ability of the *kilesas*.

But when they received an unusual form of teaching from Venerable Ajaan Mun – as when he was asked a question that warranted such a way of teaching – their mindfulness and wisdom were stirred up and became brighter and sharper. So, although Ajaan Khao was partly right and partly wrong in asking Venerable Ajaan Mun questions, they were Dhamma questions from which he could expect to gain a lot of value in the same way he had often done in the past.

### *Dhamma Principles in the Heart*

The first year that Ajaan Khao spent the *vassa* period with Venerable Ajaan Mun in the Chiang Mai region, an indescribable enthusiasm and joy arose in his heart. This opportunity was a just reward for the several years he had followed Ajaan Mun, when he had heard his teaching at times in various places but was only allowed to stay with him for brief periods, which was not truly satisfying. During those early years he would be driven away by Ajaan Mun after a short time, and told he must live in a separate location. Finally he was fortunate enough to

have Ajaan Mun give him the opportunity to join him for a *vassa* period. This made him so happy that he increased his striving greatly until he was hardly taking any sleep at all — sometimes spending the whole night striving at his meditation practice. Then one night his *citta* became fully integrated, dropping down into a state of calm where it had a complete rest for some time before withdrawing to normal consciousness. He was filled with wonder at the brightness of his heart, which went beyond anything he had ever experienced before. It caused him to become completely absorbed in Dhamma until the light of dawn appeared. That night he did not sleep at all. In the morning he got up at the usual time and went about his duties, helping to clean and arrange things at Ajaan Mun's hut and taking his bowl, robes and other things to the place where he ate food in the *sālā*.

When Ajaan Mun came from the place where he did his meditation practice, it seemed that he watched Ajaan Khao unusually closely. Ajaan Khao himself noticed this and felt very self-conscious, afraid that he may have done something wrong. After a short while Venerable Ajaan asked him:

“How is your meditation practice going now? Last night your *citta* was much brighter than it has been at any time since you came to stay with me. This is how you must do it! This is the right way for one who searches for Dhamma. Do you understand where Dhamma is now? Last night, where was that brightness?”

He answered: “The brightness was in my heart, sir”. But he felt afraid and embarrassed until he almost started shivering, for he had never before been praised and asked a question at the same time like this. Venerable Ajaan Mun then asked him:

“Where was the Dhamma before this that you could not see it? You have now seen Dhamma. From now on, you must always know that Dhamma is in the heart. In the future you must maintain well the level of your *citta* and the level of your efforts in meditation. You must not let them deteriorate. This is the ground<sup>7</sup> of the *citta*, the ground of the Dhamma, the ground of your faith in Dhamma and the ground of the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* – all of them are just there. You must be confident and resolute in your striving if you want to transcend *dukkha*. You have got to make the effort just there, in the heart. You can be absolutely certain that nowhere else but just this one place you can get free from *dukkha*.

“You must not grope around blindly in your practice, for you are no longer blind so there is no need to do so. Last night I sent the flow of my *citta* out to look at you and I saw your *citta* brightly illuminating everything around you. Throughout the night, every time I sent my *citta* out to look it was the same way. I did not get any sleep last night either. Part of the time I spent in *samādhi bhāvanā*, part of the time I was receiving *Deva* guests and part of the time I was sending out my *citta* to see how you were getting on. It went on like this until dawn without having any sense of time. As soon as I came out of *bhāvanā* I had to ask you about it, because I have always wanted to know about my fellows in Dhamma. Was it peaceful, was it blissful that time?”

Not daring to answer Ajaan Mun, Ajaan Khao remained silent. He felt that Ajaan Mun had already looked right through him and could see his lungs and liver and everything else, so what would be the use of telling him? From then on he was much

more afraid of Ajaan Mun, and much more careful where he was concerned. Even prior to that, he was quite sure that Ajaan Mun could know the minds and hearts of people as he wished. But that day he experienced it for himself, which made him that much more certain. So he became very afraid of him in a way that's hard to describe.

From that day on, he was able to firmly fix the state of his heart and develop it steadily, more and more, bit by bit, without any decline or backsliding at all. Ajaan Mun used to goad him quite frequently. Any sign of self-indulgence and he would be scolded immediately. Ajaan Mun tended to become fierce and scold him much more quickly than before. His frequent exhortations and reminders were actually methods of helping Ajaan Khao to look after his *citta* and to maintain his level of Dhamma, for they made him more afraid of backsliding in his meditation.

From that time on, he continued to spend the *vassa* period with Ajaan Mun each year. After each *vassa*, he went out wandering in order to practise the way in places where he found it to be suitable for striving. Ajaan Mun would also go off wandering, but in a different direction so as to be on his own. He did not like wandering in the company of other Bhikkhus. So the Bhikkhus all went out in different directions, each as he felt inclined. But whenever some internal problem arose in their hearts, they would make for Ajaan Mun in order to ask for his advice. Each time he would explain the answer and clear up the problem.

Venerable Ajaan Khao's efforts in meditation continued to progress steadily. His mindfulness and wisdom gradually spread and branched out until they were infused into the heart so that

they became one and the same with the heart. Whatever his bodily posture or activity, he maintained his effort with mindfulness and wisdom present at all times. His heart was bold and courageous. It had lost all fear of those things which arouse and maintain the thoughts and emotional states (*ārammaṇa*) that used to be his enemies. He was also certain of the path leading to freedom from *dukkha* – he had no doubts about it even though he had yet to actually attain complete freedom.

### *The Dhamma Remedy*

When Venerable Ajaan Khao became ill while he was living in the forests and hills, he was never much concerned about finding medicines to cure himself. He tended to rely upon the ‘Dhamma remedy’ much more than any other method, for it was effective both for the body and for the *citta* at the same time. He would grasp the problem, fix his attention on it and reflect upon it for a long time – much longer than normal. Many times he managed to overcome fevers by this type of treatment, until he became quite confident of this technique of reflective investigation whenever he felt ill. It started from the time his *citta* attained *samādhi*, when his heart became calm and cool. Whenever he had a fever, he would set up a determination to fight it unwaveringly by meditating with a completely resolute heart – a method that had always brought him clearly visible results.

At first, when he had a fever he relied upon Venerable Ajaan Mun to guide him in the correct method. Ajaan Mun

told him that whenever his own heart had gained unusually great strength, it nearly always came during times of severe sickness and pain. The more painful the sickness was, the more easily mindfulness and wisdom spun round and round the body, quickly going to each and every aspect of the illness as it happened. There was no need for him to compel himself to look into the body at that time. He had no interest at all in whether he got better or not. His only concern was to strive to know the truth of all the painful feelings as they arose and ‘swooped down’ on him at that time, using the mindfulness and wisdom that he had developed to expertise by continuous training.

Sometimes Venerable Ajaan Mun went to talk with Ajaan Khao when he had a fever. He tried to make him think by asking a pointed question, saying:

“Have you ever thought how in your past lives you experienced pain and suffering much more acute than this, just prior to the time you died? Even ordinary people in the world who have learnt nothing of Dhamma can put up with the suffering of an ordinary fever. Some of them even retain good mindfulness and seemly behaviour — better than many Bhikkhus. They do not groan and moan and restlessly move around, flinging their arms about while twisting and writhing, like some unworthy Bhikkhus who, really speaking, should not be Buddhists at all. Bhikkhus should never put themselves in a position where they tarnish the religion of the Buddha. Even though experiencing great pain and suffering, some lay people have enough mindfulness to control their manners so that they are seemly and respectable, which is quite admirable.

“I once saw a sick lay man whose children asked me to visit him as he was beyond hope of recovery. They said that their father wanted to meet me and pay his last respects to me, giving him something to keep in mind and to raise up his heart when he came to the time of his death. When I arrived at the house, no sooner had their father seen me walking up to the place where he was lying down, than he managed somehow to quickly sit up by himself, his face beaming and happy. He managed this in spite of his illness and in spite of the fact that normally he could not sit up without assistance. Actually, at that moment, all symptoms of his illness had disappeared, though there were enough indications left to show that he was quite seriously ill. He bowed down and paid homage with cheerfulness and joy in his heart, his manners and general behaviour being seemly and beautiful – which startled and perplexed everyone else in his home. They all wondered: ‘How could he get up by himself? Normally, to move a little bit to a new position while lying prostrate we have to help him all the way with great care, fearing that otherwise he may be hurt or perhaps die right then. But as soon as he saw you coming, Venerable Ajaan, he got up like a new person – not like one who is about to die anytime.’ They were amazed, for they had never seen anything like it before. Later they came to tell me that he died shortly after I left him. He was fully conscious right up to the last moment, and he seemed to die peacefully, as though he had reached some state of happiness.

“As for you, your illness is not as severe as that man’s, so why are you so careless and unmindful about examining and investigating your situation. Or is it your laziness that weighs your heart down and makes your body weak and flabby. If

many *Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhus* act like this, people will criticise the way of Buddhism. The way of *Kammaṭṭhāna* will fall apart because none of the *Bhikkhus* can put up with difficulties since they are all too weak and flabby. Their *Kammaṭṭhāna* is also weak and flabby, so they are just waiting on the chopping block for the *kilesas* to come and chop them up and make a salad of them. The Lord Buddha did not proclaim the teaching of mindfulness and wisdom for lazy, weak and flabby people who merely look at their sickness without thinking, searching and investigating in terms of Dhamma. The death of such a weak and lazy person would be of no consequence – in fact it’s no more worthy than the death of a rat.

“Don’t bring the attitude of a pig waiting casually on the ‘chopping block’ into the *Sāsana* and the circle of *Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhus*. It makes me feel ashamed in the face of those lay people who are more worthy than such *Bhikkhus*. I even feel ashamed in the face of the rats that die peacefully because they are better than *Bhikkhus* who become weak and lazy when they have a fever, and then die without any mindfulness and wisdom to look after themselves. You should try doing some investigation to see whether the Dhamma truths – such as the Truth of *Dukkha* – are really true or not. How true are they, and where is their truth to be found? Does the truth dwell in the carelessness, weakness and laziness that you are promoting at present? These tendencies are just promoting the Cause of *Dukkha* so that it accumulates in the *citta*, making you stupid and preventing you from rising out of it. It is not the way of the Path – which leads one entirely to the Cessation of *Dukkha*.

“I boldly proclaim that I have gained strength of heart at times of severe sickness by examining the *dukkha* that arose

within me. I saw clearly the place where it arose and established itself, along with its dying away and ceasing, by means of true mindfulness and wisdom. The *citta* that knows the Truth of *Dukkha* becomes calm and peaceful. It does not go about looking for something to change its state; instead, being ‘one’ and single, it remains firmly within the truth. There is nothing in the *citta* to cause trouble or unseemly actions; nor can anything false enter to cause doubt or uncertainty. At that point, painful feelings either cease completely or, even if they remain, they are quite unable to overwhelm the *citta*. The *citta* and the pain are both true, each in its own sphere<sup>8</sup>. This is where the Dhamma Truths become the highest truths. You must stay focused in the *citta* as you thoroughly investigate everything. Mindfulness and wisdom become active because you investigate, not because you’re too lazy to make use of the very tools that are capable of countering the *kilesas*.

“Here is a simile to help you understand: If you take a stone and throw it at someone’s head, it can cause injury, or maybe even kill him. But you can also make valuable use of that stone for sharpening knives, or other purposes. Accordingly, a fool uses a stone to do damage, whereas a clever person uses it for good purposes to help himself in desirable ways. Mindfulness and wisdom are like this: they can be used wrongly to think out ways of doing things that are morally bad; such as, being clever in a deceitful way in one’s business affairs, or clever in robbery and banditry, or being slick and quicker than a monkey so that others cannot follow what one is up to — all actions that usually turn into evil because of using mindfulness and wisdom in the wrong way.

“But we can also use mindfulness and wisdom in the right way in our livelihood, by using them in such things as building work, or carpentry, or writing, or the various kinds of repair work in which we are skilled. Or we may use them to cure our *kilesas* and *taṇhā* – which fix us firmly to the wheel of *samsāra* and lead us to endless rounds of birth and death – until they have all been removed from the heart. Then we become purified and reach the state of freedom, *Nibbāna*. It may happen today, or this month, or this year, or in this lifetime; for it is not beyond the ability of human beings to attain this, as we can see from the example of those clever people who have done so from the time of the Lord Buddha up to the present day.

“Wisdom brings endless benefits to those who have enough interest and incentive to use contemplative thought without fixing any bounds or limits to it. Mindfulness and wisdom have never deceived people by leading them into a state of despair with no way out. So we need not be afraid that we’ll develop too much mindfulness and wisdom, or that they will turn us into someone who is good at breaking up and destroying whatever Dhamma we have within us. We need not fear that an abundance of mindfulness and wisdom will hinder our chances of attaining freedom by overwhelming us before we’re even half way there.

“Since ancient times, the wisest of people have always praised mindfulness and wisdom, saying that they are the most exalted faculties, and never out-of-date. You should therefore think and search, digging up mindfulness and wisdom and promoting them as the best means of defending yourself and the best method of completely destroying the enemy within you. Then you will see a most excellent and precious sphere of

the heart that has always been there within you since endless ages past. This Dhamma that I am teaching to you comes entirely from the Dhamma that I have experienced directly as a result of investigating it thoroughly. It is not based on guesswork – like scratching without being able to locate the itch – for what I teach comes from what I have known and experienced with certainty.

“Those who want to get free from *dukkha*, yet are afraid of the *dukkha* that arises within them and so refuse to investigate it, will never be able to get free from *dukkha*. The way to *Nibbāna* depends on the Truth of *Dukkha* and the Cause of *Dukkha* as the means of going forward on the Path. *The Lord Buddha and every one of the Sāvaka Arahants attained the fulfilment of the Path, Fruition and Nibbāna by means of the Four Noble Truths.* Not one of them failed to pass completely through these Noble Truths.

“At this time some of these Noble Truths are quite clearly and openly displaying their true nature within your body and mind. You must investigate these truths, using mindfulness and wisdom to get to really know them clearly. You must not sit back and merely gaze at them or you will become an invalid in the area of these Dhamma Truths which have always been true since the beginning of the world.

“If we *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhus* cannot face the truth that is displaying itself so clearly to us, who else will ever be able to face up to it and know it? Those in *Kammatṭhāna* circles are closer and more intimate with the Dhamma Truths than anyone else, so they should be able to realise their true nature before others do. Although others outside the circle of *Kammatṭhāna* also have the Dhamma Truths as an inherent

part of the body and mind, they differ in that they avoid doing any investigation which would lead them to understand them in a different way. This is because their position as lay people affords them less of an opportunity to pursue these practices.

“But the *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhu* is a special case, for he is fully prepared to progress steadily towards realising the truth which is apparent within him all the time. If you have the blood of a warrior who is truly worthy of the name given by the Great Teacher — *Sākyaputta Buddhajinorasa* (Son of the *Sākya*, the Victorious Buddha) — you must try to investigate so as to realise the truth clearly.

“Right now the truth about painful feeling is announcing its presence within your body and mind in a clear and unmistakable manner. Don’t let the opportunity presented to you by this pain pass by uselessly. Instead, I want you to extract the truth from that painful feeling and bring it up for mindfulness and wisdom to analyse. Then mark it well, so that it makes an indelible impression on your heart. From then on, it will act as an example to show that you have now gained a clear understanding of this first of the four Truths that the Lord Buddha proclaimed throughout his teaching, namely, the Truth of *Dukkha*. You will have gained this understanding by means of your mindfulness and wisdom in a way that leaves no room for doubt. This will happen as you endeavour to make knowledge of that Truth steadily develop, thus increasing your understanding until every bit of doubt has disappeared.

“If you strive to do what I have just taught you, then although the fever in your body increases, you yourself will appear to be perfectly well and fit. In other words, your heart won’t be disturbed by or apprehensive of the pain arising in

your body. Instead, you will take pride and satisfaction from what you have realised in a calm, steady manner. You will not display any outward symptoms, restlessly moving and changing about as the fever gets worse. This is what's meant by learning Dhamma for the Truth. The wisest people have all learnt it in this way. They do not wishfully imagine the types of feelings they would like to have – thinking how they would prefer this or that kind of feeling according to their desires – all of which merely accumulates the Cause of *Dukkha*, thus making it increase and grow much stronger.

*“You must take this teaching to heart and remember it well. You must continue investigating to find the meaning of Dhamma, which is the Truth that is within yourself.* This knowledge is well within each and every person's capability. I am merely the one who teaches the way to do it. Whether the pupil is fearless and valiant, or weak and flabby, depends entirely on the person who does the investigation – no one else has a say in that at all. Well now! It's time for you to live up to your teacher's expectations. Don't just lie there like a foot-wiping rag, letting the *kilesas* come to stomp all over you and beat you out flat. This would be disastrous and bring nothing but trouble in the future – don't say I haven't warned you!”

Venerable Ajaan Khao recalled that: “When Venerable Ajaan Mun gave me this Dhamma talk, it was as though a violent storm had passed through and then disappeared. I was so moved by his skilful, penetrating teaching that I felt I would float up into the air with rapture and joy. Nothing else could have been so valuable to me at that time. As soon as Ajaan Mun left, I began practising the methods in which he had so kindly in-

structed me. I began to the best of my ability to examine and unravel the problem of the painful feelings I was experiencing then, without exhibiting any form of weakness at all.

“While doing the investigation of pain after Ajaan Mun left, it felt as if he were still sitting there with me, watching me and waiting to help show me how to do it the whole time. More than that, the feeling of his presence gave me strength of heart to increase my fight with painful feeling.

“While doing the investigation, I tried to separate *dukkha* out from the *khandhas*. In other words, the body and all its parts I put into one heap (*khandha*); *saññā* (memory), which stands by to define or determine, thereby deceiving us, I divided into a second heap; *sankhāra*, which is thinking and imagining, I put into a third heap; and the *citta* I put separately into a special category. Then I investigated, I compared, I looked for causes and results from the arising and ceasing of the chaotic jumble of pain that was racking my body. But I did not think about whether the pain would die away and I would survive, or whether it would get worse and I would die, for I was absolutely determined to get to know the truth of all these things.

“In particular, I wanted to find out what in fact the Truth of *Dukkha* was. Why should it have such power that it can shake up and disturb the hearts of all beings throughout the world without exception? This happens when *dukkha* arises in normal circumstances due to all sorts of different causes. More so, it arises when people reach the end of their lives and are just about to leave this life and go to a new state. All sentient beings of every kind feel very frightened at that time. None of them are bold and fearless enough to face up to death and accept it – except when they are forced to face it because there’s

no other alternative, no way out. If there was any way to avoid it, they would escape to the other end of the world if necessary to get away from it — all because of the fear of death.

“After Ajaan Mun left, I thought to myself: ‘I am also one of these sentient beings who are timid and frightened of *dukkha*, so what should I do about the *dukkha* I’m now experiencing in order that I may be bold and fearless, with the truth as my witness. Well! I must contend with *dukkha* by using mindfulness and wisdom to follow the methods taught by the Great Teacher, and my own teacher as well. A short time ago, Venerable Ajaan Mun kindly taught me in a way that went straight to my heart, leaving no room for doubt. He taught that I should fight using mindfulness and wisdom to separate and analyse these *khandhas*, examining to see them quite clearly. Right now, what *khandha* is this painful feeling? Can it be the body, or memory, or thought and imagination, or consciousness, or the *citta*? If it cannot be any of those, then why do I make out that the painful feeling is me — that I am in pain— that pain is truly mine? Am I really this painful feeling, or what? I must find out the truth of this today. So, if the pain does not stop, and I have not come to know this painful feeling quite clearly with true mindfulness and wisdom, I shall go on sitting here in meditation until I die if necessary. But I will definitely not get up from this place just to let the pain mock and ridicule me.’

“From that moment on, mindfulness and wisdom began aggressively analysing as if it were a matter of life or death. This life-and-death struggle between the *citta* and the pain went on for five hours. Following that, I knew the truth about each one of the *khandhas* on its own. But in particular, I knew the feeling group most clearly by means of wisdom. *As soon as*

the investigation had thoroughly and completely penetrated every aspect of the *khandhas*, the painful feelings died away immediately. From then on, an unshakeable faith in the validity of the Noble Truths arose in me, based upon the Truth of *Dukkha*. I then knew the truth of it without any doubt or uncertainty.

“From that day forward, whenever I got a fever, or any other sickness, my heart was able to be victorious by practising the way of mindfulness and wisdom — never again was I weak and spineless in the face of pain. Instead, my heart gained strength in times of pain and sickness, which are times of serious concern — maybe even matters of life and death. The Dhamma which I, like most ordinary people not faced with a critical situation, had never taken very seriously, then displayed the truth for me to see clearly as I thoroughly investigated painful feeling. The pain then ceased, and the heart became concentrated and went down and reached the base of *samādhi*. All doubts and problems with regard to the body and mind then ceased while they went quiescent. This lasted until the *citta* withdrew from that state, which took several hours. Whatever else needed to be investigated would be dealt with in the future with fearless regard for the Truth which had already been seen.”

When Ajaan Khao’s *citta* became concentrated and dropped down to reach the basis of *samādhi* due to the powerful influence of the investigation, the fever ceased immediately and did not return again. He said that it was quite extraordinary how this could happen.

In regard to this, the author believes what Ajaan Khao said without question, because I have also done such investigations in a similar manner and have experienced the same kind

of results. So I feel fully confident that the ‘Dhamma remedy’ is quite capable of treating sickness in subtle and strange ways, and I appreciate those meditators who have tendencies of character in this direction.

Most of the *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhus* like to do such investigations as a remedy for their own body and mind when they become seriously ill with painful fevers. But they like doing it quietly on their own, and they don’t readily tell other people about it – except their friends who are also doing the practice in the same way and who have similar characters. With them they can talk intimately about these things.

It must be understood, however, that the aforementioned practice of curing diseases by using meditation should not be taken to mean that all diseases can be cured by such methods. Even the Bhikkhus who practice them are by no means sure which diseases can be cured in this way and which cannot. But regardless of what happens, they are never indifferent or neglectful about the changes taking place within them. Even when it happens that the body is going to die due to a disease, they must also use the power of the ‘Dhamma remedy’ to make sure that some of the diseases of the *citta* – meaning some of the *kilesas* and *āsavas* – die at the same time. They are therefore relentless in their investigations into the various diseases that arise, both in the body and in the *citta*. They believe it to be an important and necessary duty in connection with the *khandhas* and the *citta* – which they must investigate and accept responsibility for, right up to the last moment.

VENERABLE AJAAN KHAO invariably preferred to cure fevers and illnesses by using the ‘Dhamma remedy’. At one time he was staying in a hilly part of Sakon Nakhon province which at that time was infested with malaria. One day after he had finished eating his food, he immediately began to feel feverish and shivery. He wrapped himself in several blankets to keep warm, but to no avail. He looked about for a warm place but it was hopeless, so he gave up trying to treat the problem by external means. He decided, instead, to treat it internally by means of Dhamma, which he had already done successfully in the past. He told the other Bhikkhus who were with him to go away and leave him alone. They were to wait until they saw that he had opened the door of his hut before coming to see him again. After all the Bhikkhus had gone, he began to meditate by investigating painful feelings in the same way as he had done before. He started about 9 o’clock in the morning and went on until 3 o’clock in the afternoon before he was finally successful. The fever died away and he was cured. At the same time, his *citta* became concentrated and dropped down until it reached its natural level, where it rested for about two hours. Finally, at about 6 o’clock in the evening, he left the place where he had been practising *samādhi* meditation, feeling a buoyancy of body and heart without anything left to cause him trouble. The fever had completely gone and his *citta* had become bright and skilled with wisdom, standing out prominently within himself. He has lived with the *Vihāra-dhamma*<sup>9</sup> ever since then.

## *Locked in Spiritual Combat*

While Ajaan Khao was spending the *vassa* at Wat Pa Ban Poang, Sun Maha Pon district in Chiang Mai province, he accelerated his efforts in meditation round the clock in every posture and activity, much more so than in his previous *vassa* periods. In previous years he had worked very hard as well, but this *vassa* he made a special effort beyond what he had done before. He did this by maintaining his efforts in the three postures of standing, walking and sitting, without lying down at all. If he slept at all, he did so in the sitting position he used when doing *samādhi bhāvanā*, and only then when his body and mind had reached the limit of their ability to go without sleep – which was a time when his mindfulness was at a low ebb. But he refused to let himself give up working so as to lie down and sleep, as he used to when he indulged in the fourth posture of lying down. This was because he clearly saw good results in both *samādhi* and wisdom. He saw how his heart was more intimately calm and his wisdom was more subtle, penetrating and proficient than when he was striving in the way he had been practising before. This gave him encouragement in his effort to maintain the practice in the three postures throughout the *vassa* without letting his body slouch or assume a posture that would incline towards lying down to sleep.

If we use the language of a warrior, he was locked in combat, fighting to win or lose against the *kilesas*, which like to think only of a comfortable bed and a pillow. If they had their way, he would lie down and give in completely, laid out flat at

full length like a snake — together with his faith, effort, mindfulness, *samādhi* and wisdom.

So he determined that those *kilesas* which drag the Bhikkhu down onto the sleeping mat must put up with fasting (Bhikkhu meat is tasty for the *kilesas*) and emaciation for those three months of the *vassa* period. Then those five Dhamma-results would get a chance to walk along the path of the Lord Buddha. Practising in that way, he could sense imminent victory coming from his struggle to fight in all three postures, as though he were on the verge of attaining Dhamma in each posture. This added increased enthusiasm to his efforts. His body and heart became light and buoyant due to the various kinds of Dhamma he developed, and his striving became easier as it shifted back and forth fighting against the *kilesas*. He was not concerned about the difficulties he faced in fighting the *kilesas*, which he realised deep in his heart were his enemies.

ONE NIGHT WHILE HE WAS SITTING in *samādhi bhāvanā*, his *citta* dropped down into a subtle state of calm and reached the ground of *samādhi*. It remained there resting for a long time before withdrawing to the level of *upacāra samādhi*, where a *nimitta* arose in his *citta* and he saw the whole earth whirling round like a wheel. The more closely he examined that *nimitta*, the faster it went round, as though the earth and sky were about to collapse. He felt as though he was floating just above the ground and moving along parallel with the earth, though he wasn't actually walking. In the *nimitta* it seemed that his body was floating along the *caṅkama* path he normally used. It floated back and forth many times before it stopped. As soon

as it stopped, a light appeared. It seemed to shine down from the sky above and enter into his heart, enabling him to see all the parts within his body quite clearly. He became engrossed in examining the various parts within his body, contemplating them in terms of the ‘basis for the seeing of their loathsomeness’ (*asubha kammaṭṭhāna*) and in terms of the ‘three characteristics’ (*Ti-lakkaṇa*), and the heart was joyful and bright with wisdom, faith and fearless determination.

He discovered many skilful ways and methods for extracting various kinds of *kilesas*, methods that came to him continually throughout that retreat period. During that *vassa* he practised with great energy and enthusiasm and he understood things very clearly. He experienced none of the sombre moods that had troubled him often in the past. Instead, there was a firm resolve in the direction of *samādhi*, and a clever skilfulness and nimbleness in the direction of mindfulness and wisdom, those two friends of a heart that’s striving relentlessly in every posture. At that level, the relationship between mindfulness and wisdom and the *citta*, which is known as ‘automatic striving’, began to appear quite clearly within the *citta*. Then, in all postures, the *citta* kept up a constant effort all the time, excepting only when he slept. There was no longer a need to force mindfulness and wisdom to work like there had been in the past when he was forced to push them to strive all the time. Previously, if he had not done so, the *kilesas* would have forced him onto the ‘chopping block’ where he would never have been able to stand against them. At earlier stages of his training, his *kilesas* were much more active, quick and penetrating than his mindfulness, wisdom and effort were.

We should never pride ourselves on being really clever and skilled when the *citta* is merely at the level of *samādhī*, or calmness. Although the *citta* is calm, it is still subject to the seductive temptations of the *kilesas*, which cause it to become addicted to *samādhī* and so lose all interest in investigating with wisdom — which is the way to extract the *kilesas* and get rid of them from the heart.

When the time comes that wisdom moves out to do the work of confronting and fighting the various *kilesas*, it steadily succeeds in defeating them, rarely finding that it is at a loss, not knowing what to do. We steadily get to know the various alluring enticements of the *kilesas* — how they appear so harmoniously beautiful and melodious that we become overwhelmed by their lingering appeal. This is why all beings in the world never tire of the various enticements used by the *kilesas*. This despite the fact that they tempt beings over and over again to love, and to hate, and to be so angry or greedy as to cause beings great difficulty because they have to put up with so much suffering and torment. However many hundreds, or thousands, or millions of times people do this, still they are never fed up or satiated with it; nor do they see the harmfulness of these enticements at all. If they do see the harm in them, it comes only in a flash when they are experiencing so much suffering and torment that they are truly in a corner with no way out. But almost immediately the allure of the *kilesas* returns and puts them into a dozing sleep. From then on, the day never comes when anything arouses them enough to see the harmfulness of it.

The effort that begins arising at this level of practice is an aggressive kind of effort which fights the *kilesas*, repeatedly

striking at them in many different ways so as to beat up and kill off more and more of them. This kind of effort is in no way at a loss, because it is not lulled into a drunken stupor by the *kilesas*. It does not look on them as friends and allies and so submit to them in life and death, as was the case before the Dhamma weapons of mindfulness and wisdom were powerful enough to overwhelm them. At the stage that Ajaan Khao had reached, all of his Dhamma weapons were becoming very powerful as they shone forth brightly. They really enjoyed digging up the *kilesas*, pulling them out and tearing them to pieces quite ruthlessly.

It seems that the firmness of his intention to gain that realm where there is freedom from *dukkha* steadily gained strength until his striving reached a point of urgency where the practice was a matter of life and death. Whatever was good would remain, whatever was bad must be destroyed without any regrets. Birth and death are barbs and thorns which the *kilesas* always stab into the heart, where they have been the ruling power for countless ages. But they were longer allowed to have any power to rule, for from then on it was to be the supremely excellent pure Dhamma which alone had power to rule over the heart. Dhamma now ruled the heart where Ajaan Khao previously let the *kilesas* and the ‘wheel of *samsāra*’ rule. Instead of Dhamma being driven away and losing out to the *kilesas* every time, he refused to have the *kilesas* in his heart anymore.

AFTER THAT VASSA PERIOD, he left that place to go wandering in the *Kammaṭṭhāna* way wherever he felt like going. He went

to stay near a forest village in Chiang Mai province where a small hut had been built. In the past, *Dhutanga Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhus* had stayed there to work at their practice, but now it was abandoned. It was a very peaceful and quiet place, far away from the village, so he stayed there to develop his practice.

One day it started raining heavily in the middle of the day, so he could not go out to walk *caṅkama*. He closed the door, the windows and the wall<sup>10</sup>, and he sat in *bhāvanā* on the floor of the hut, which was raised well above the ground.

While he was sitting doing meditation, it seemed to him that a red-hot burning pipe had been stuck into his butt. It stopped for awhile and then came up again. So he turned to investigate what it was all about. As soon as his *citta* turned to focus on the cause of the hot pipe which was burning him, he realised that the fire was actually the heat of sexual desire appearing from beneath his hut. He knew that it did not come from his own heart. He checked his investigation thoroughly and confirmed that it was in fact the fire of *rāgataṅhā* coming from underneath his hut, for in his own *citta* there was absolutely no sign of *rāgataṅhā* at all.

The whole time he was engaged in investigating this fire, he never paused to wonder where this fire came from. He was merely reflecting internally trying to work out in his heart: “How has this blaze of *rāga* been able to cling onto me? I have no fixed attachment to or desire for any man or woman, so my heart is normal — no *rāga* has arisen in it.”

Every day when he went on *piṇḍapāta* in the village, he went fully self-controlled, having mindfulness present to watch cautiously every aspect and phase of all those emotional biases

which had been enemies of the *citta*. His heart could never find any aspect of *rāgatañhā* that could be an emotional bias.

When that ‘fire’ had calmed down and no longer showed itself, he opened his eyes and rose from his meditation seat, by which time the rain had stopped. Looking behind him, he saw a woman come out from under his hut and walk away. This made him connect the fire that had burned him with the woman who was just then walking away from under his hut. He realised then that the woman probably had bad thoughts about him, which caused that incident to happen. It’s something that he would never have imagined possible.

Actually that woman was quite young, about 25 years old, and most likely unmarried. She was probably out gathering edible plants or firewood, for she was carrying a basket. As she approached his hut it started to rain heavily, so she quickly took shelter under the hut until the rain stopped, after which she came out and walked away. When Ajaan Khao looked out the window, which was covered by a straw mat with many gaps in it, he could see the woman quite clearly.

When telling this story to the Bhikkhus and novices on suitable occasions, Ajaan Khao never implied that he was blaming or criticising the woman at all. He simply used the story of this woman as an example to explain to them about the flow of the *citta*. Whether focused externally or internally, it is something so subtle that we are normally unaware of it. It is only the process of investigation in the manner of the practice of *citta bhāvanā* that enables us to gradually come to know such things.

He said that his *citta* was in a very subtle state at that time, and his mindfulness and wisdom were fast enough to keep up

with such happenings. They were not as slow as they used to be when he first started to train himself, so when the *rāga* within his *citta* suddenly became active his mindfulness kept up with it, but his wisdom was still not able to cut it off at that stage. Later on, the ability of mindfulness and wisdom that he trained relentlessly reached the point where *rāga* could not stand against it, so it was bound to break up and disperse from the heart in a clearly evident way.

He felt at that stage that his striving was progressing very quickly and fearlessly. When performing the regular morning and evening chanting, he did it in a brief form, for his mind was in a hurry to get on to striving with mindfulness and wisdom. He even stopped reciting the various *sutta* texts, which he previously chanted, in order to put all his effort into developing his mindfulness and wisdom so as to gain freedom as quickly as possible while there was still time. He was afraid that he would die before he got to his desired goal — the *Arahatta-dhamma*.

