

*When Ajaan Khao lived in the forests and the mountains, he got the local villagers to lay out three different paths for walking meditation. He walked caṅkama on these three paths at three different times each day.*



*In the early afternoon, he started walking on the path dedicated to Dhamma Pūjā.*

## Path Two



*Dhamma Pūjā*



## *The Completely Pure Citta*

A bad fever afflicted Ajaan Khao the following *vassa*, but his relentless efforts against the *kilesas* continued. Neither side would back down. The fever remained with him throughout the *vassa*, but his examination of the painful feelings and the body — which is the home of suffering — never weakened or gave way. However strong the fever and however much the suffering, it was as though they acted as fuel for mindfulness and wisdom, causing them to show their skilfulness to the utmost. His heart took up the pain that arose from the fever in his body, which was the basis of his suffering, and used those painful feelings like a boxing ring to stage a fight against the *kilesas*, which were so punishing they gave no break for rest at the end of each round. If mindfulness and wisdom had relaxed or given way, the fever would have lay him out cold, and probably have kill him. So he and his *kilesas* fought together in the manner of a life-or-death struggle. Neither the fever nor his suffering eased or gave way at all, so his striving could not give way either. If he gave way, he could not keep up with the *kilesas* and destroy them. So the outcome depended on his diligent effort. As there was no way he could avoid the situation, he was forced to keep on struggling until he under-

stood the reasons behind his suffering. Only then was he able to be victorious and gain confidence in his ability.

That *vassa* was extremely difficult. Because he suffered malarial fever throughout the whole retreat period, he was required to push himself to the limit, both physically and mentally. The physical pain was excruciating; while in his heart he was striving relentlessly to follow the fever and the painful feelings.

After the end of the *vassa*, his fever gradually subsided and went away. He then left and went wandering in solitude, going from place to place as it suited his inclinations without attachment to anything except only his efforts in meditation. It was then the season when the rice was harvested.

One evening after he swept the ground around his hut, he went off to take a bath. As he was walking along, he saw how the rice growing in the fields was golden yellow and almost ripe. This immediately made him think and question:

“This rice has sprouted and grown because there is a seed which caused it to grow. The heart that endlessly leads one to birth and death must also have something that acts as a seed within it in the same way the rice plants have. If that seed in the heart is not destroyed entirely, it is bound to lead to further births and deaths going on endlessly. Now, what is this seed in the heart? What could it be but the *kilesas*, *avijjā*, *taṅhā* and *upādāna*?”

He continued thinking and probing into this problem, taking *avijjā* as the target of his research. He investigated it by going forward and then backward, backward and then forward, examining it over and over again with intense interest, trying to understand the true nature of *avijjā*. Beginning at dusk and

continuing throughout the night, he went on relentlessly investigating the relationship between *avijjā* and the *citta*. At dawn, just as it was beginning to get light, his wisdom was able to break through to a final conclusion. *Avijjā* then fell away from the *citta* without any remainder. The contemplation of the rice stopped at the point where the rice was ripe never to sprout again. His investigation into the *citta* also stopped as soon as *avijjā* ceased, after which the *citta* became ripe in the same way as the rice became ripe. At that point it was clearly evident to him that the *citta* had stopped creating any more births in the various realms of existence. What remained for him to admire to his complete satisfaction, as he sat in his hut in the midst of the mountains, was the complete and utter purity of the *citta*.

At the moment the *citta* passed beyond the tangled jungles of the ‘round of *kilesas*’ (*kilesa-vatṭa*), wonder and amazement arose in him as he sat alone at dawn. Then the sun began to shine brightly in the sky, while his heart began to get brighter and brighter as it left the realm of *avijjā* and went towards the wonder of Dhamma where it reached *vimutti* – freedom – as the sun rose above the mountains. It was truly a most auspicious and wonderful occasion.

After this supremely auspicious and blessed moment had passed, it was time for him to go *pinḍapāta*. While he was walking away from that auspicious place, he looked back at the little hut that had provided him with so much happiness and such wonders. Then, looking all around him, he saw how everything else appeared to have become supremely auspicious in sympathy with his heart, which was entirely and completely

wonderful throughout — although, in fact, all these things were simply there in accordance with their own nature as usual.

While walking on *piṇḍapāta*, his heart was filled with Dhamma. When he looked at the local forest people who had looked after him, it seemed almost as if they were all divine beings. He reflected on all the assistance they had so graciously given him, and he felt that it would be impossible to describe the extent of their virtue. *Mettā* and compassion arose in him for those ‘heavenly’ forest people. He could not help but spread out the *mettā* in his *citta* as a dedication to them as he passed by them along the route, which he did until he reached the vicinity of the hut where he stayed, which was a place of such happiness.

While he arranged the simple food which the hill people had put into his bowl, his heart was full of Dhamma. He did not turn his thoughts to the food that had always sustained his body, but he merely ate it as that which the body depended upon for its maintenance. He later recalled:

“Since the day I was born this was the first time that I had ever experienced the body and mind in perfect harmony with the *citta*, which is something quite impossible to explain. All I can say is that it was a most wonderful and unique experience that became the most outstanding event of my life, leaving a deep and lasting impression on my heart.

“After this world-shaking event occurred, when the sky and ground collapsed and the ‘wheel of *samsāra*’ — the *vaṭṭa-cakka* in the heart — broke up and disappeared, all the elements and *khandhas* as well as every part and aspect of the *citta* were all free to conform to their own natural state. They were no longer enslaved or forced into service by anything. The five

*indriya* and the six *āyatana* will continue to function and do their duties until they disappear at death, but there won't be any dispute between them as there was in the past. (The dispute he referred to is the disharmony between internal sense bases and external objects when they come into contact. This contact in turn gives rise to gladness or sorrow that then turns into the arising of *sukha* and *dukkha*. All these are interconnected like the links of an endless chain going on forever.)

“The disputes within the *citta*, which are far more numerous and disturbing than those externally in the world, all stopped at the moment the ‘court of justice’ was finally established within the heart. Such troublesome disputes used to take the *citta* as the arena where they would dance about arguing and quarrelling. The *citta* was never given any time to be calm and quiet, because *avijjā-taṇhā*, ‘the boss’, directed and ordered it to cause turmoil and confusion of countless different kinds. But now, all of that has dissolved into a joyful harmonious state of peaceful calm. The world within the *citta* is now free and empty. Now only the most superb and excellent Truths of Dhamma (*Vijjā-Dhamma*) are produced there, which allows me to enjoy the realm of the ‘*citta*-king’ instead of the former state of anti-Dhamma.

“Affairs, both external and internal, now proceed smoothly in accordance with Dhamma without being harassed and disturbed by an enemy. So the eyes see, the ears hear, the nose smells, the tongue tastes, the body feels things hot or cold, soft or hard, and the heart receives and knows the various supporters of perceptions (*ārammaṇa*) in its natural way without distorting and altering everything as it used to – making out that right is wrong, that being shackled is freedom, that what

is bad is good, that ghosts are people, that virtuous Bhikkhus are evil ghosts (*preta*) and conversely that evil ghosts are good people. That is what the Lord of anti-Dhamma used to do when he had the power to dictate. Now I can simply sit down and rest peacefully, knowing that whether I live or die I have complete happiness. I am genuinely free of *dukkha* and free of danger without any residue of attachment of any sort whatsoever.”

This was the aphorism that Venerable Ajaan Khao exclaimed in his heart at that time.

AJAAN KHAO WAS ONE OF SEVERAL of Venerable Ajaan Mun’s disciples who stripped away all *dukkha* and got rid of all dangers from his heart while living and practising in Chiang Mai province. He said:

“The place where I practised the way until I reached freedom from the *dukkha* within me made a strong impression on me. There was the little hut which gave me shelter so I could practise and strive and also rest my body; the paths where I walked *caṅkama*; the place where I sat in *samādhi* meditation day and night; and the village where I walked for *piṇḍapāta* to get food for maintaining my body. All of them made a great impression that went deep into my heart in an inexplicable way, far more so than any other place I ever lived at. This feeling has remained buried in my heart right up to the present day, and my memory of that place has never faded or become dull and stale. From the moment when the ‘wheel of *samsāra*’ was demolished and fell away from my heart, that place changed and became the abode of supreme happiness in all situations at all times. It was as if I were in the presence of the Lord Buddha

at the place of his enlightenment, and every other place where he practised striving for Dhamma.

“All uncertainty about the Lord Buddha was swept away at that moment. Even though he entered *Parinibbāna* a long time ago, as reckoned by the usual conventions of time, yet it seems as though he is residing here in my heart every moment, as though he had never entered *Parinibbāna* at all. All of my uncertainties about the true nature of Dhamma – whether it is much or little, profound or shallow, gross or subtle – were entirely swept away. I understood that Dhamma is permanently established in this one heart and that this Dhamma is complete in and of itself without any deficiencies whatsoever. All doubt and uncertainty disappeared concerning the *Sāvaka Sangha*, which is *Supaṭipanno*. These three ‘Jewels’ of absolute purity are fused into one in the heart that lives with Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, each of which are pure and integrated together as one Dhamma.

“From that time on, I have remained completely contented with no concerns or worries deceiving my heart. Whatever my circumstances, I am my own master in that situation. Nothing remains to order me about or to creep in and ask for a share of everything – like a parasite – as when I was living with that beggar all the time, without realising it. First it wanted this! Then it wanted that! It was always pleading for something.”

When Ajaan Khao spoke of ‘wanting this’ and ‘wanting that’, he was talking about the *kilesas*, whose basic nature is to always feel needy and unsatisfied. Once they have established a powerful position in the heart of a person or animal, they are bound to demand or beg incessantly, for this is their natural way of

acting. They constantly incite us to think like this, or to speak like that, or to act in various ways according to their power. If we don't have the Dhamma needed to prevent the 'leakage' which comes from the stubborn demanding and begging of this gang of *kilesas*, we are likely to be divided up as spoils so that they can 'eat us up', until there is nothing left.

It can even reach the point where we don't have enough virtue left to enable us to be born again in the future as a good person with moral principles. Wherever we are reborn, it is bound to be the wrong place and the wrong situation. We won't be able to get sufficient contentment in our next birth to justify the effort we made to be born into such a state. Then we will have lost not only our 'capital', but the 'interest' from it as well. In other words, when we are heedless and complacent, we grant the *kilesas* the power to take complete charge of the *citta*, without having any defence to resist them at all. They then take over and grab until there's nothing left.

But those who get rid of all their debts, and put an end to the untidy mess in their hearts, continue to live happily in all the activities of their *khandhas*. When life comes to an end, they drop the burden of the *khandhas*. All that remains is the purity of "Buddho". This is the complete and eternal end of all *dukkha* — a wonderful ending, and a moment of far greater value than anything in the three worlds. It is quite different from existence in the world of conventions (*sammuti*) where most beings openly desire birth, and are not in the least interested to consider the *dukkha* which is bound to come as a consequence of that birth.

The truth is that birth and *dukkha* cannot be separated. Even in those cases where it is minimal, *dukkha* is still bound

to be there. The wisest of men are therefore far more afraid of birth than they are of death. By contrast, most of us fear death more than birth. But death is simply a result of its basic cause, which is birth. This fear of death is a fear that is in complete opposition to the basic principles of nature, and it comes about because people have no interest in searching out the truth about death. Indeed they resist it, so *dukkha* is with them all the time.

If the wisest of men had the kind of *kilesas* that made them laugh at other's foolishness, they would probably be unable to contain themselves and may have to let it all out to their heart's content when they see almost everyone in the world setting themselves against the truth with such determination – without ever looking around to search for the basic principles of truth. But actually the truly wise do not act in the usual way of the world. They have only *mettā* and compassion for the world, giving help by teaching the way. As for those who are beyond all hope, the wise let them go their way as nothing can be done to help them.

VENERABLE AJAAN KHAO TRANSCENDED all the fear and danger that he used to have in *samsāra* and reached *Nibbāna* while still alive (*Sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*) when living in a place called Long Khot in the Phrao district of Chiang Mai province, in his sixteenth or seventeenth *vassa*. I cannot remember which, but I do know that it was the beginning of the harvest season just after the end of the *vassa* period. He related the whole story to me in a manner that touched the heart, one evening as we discussed Dhamma from 8 p.m. until after midnight. Because

nobody came to disturb us for the whole of that time, both of us were able to talk Dhamma freely, right through to the final conclusion — which was the final result that arose from our practice of Dhamma. We started from the basic ABCs of our respective practices, which meant the basic training that we did which was a mixture of slipping back and scrambling up again, at times falling into a bad state, or a state that alternated between bad and good, and at other times feeling the satisfaction or dejection which resulted from the ups and downs of the practices that we used in our initial training. We went on right through our meditation until we each reached the ultimate and final point of the *citta* and Dhamma.

The results of my discussion with him were so satisfying that I have taken the opportunity to include his comments in this book so that those who read it and are interested in attaining Dhamma may use it as a field for contemplation. They can then choose which aspects are suitable for them to use in their own practice, depending on their own temperaments. The result which comes from such a discriminating choice is likely to be a smooth and steady development that is right and appropriate, depending on the strength of one's resolve.

Ajaan Khao was entirely qualified to be a constant source of great value for those in the world who associated with him. His outward behaviour was impeccable, as was his inward knowing of the way of Dhamma, which was like a 'diamond of the first water' buried deeply within him. Such a precious gem is extremely hard to find, and can only be found by someone who has returned from the threshold of death. I have secretly given him the name: "Diamond of the First Water" in the *Kammaṭṭhāna* lineage of Venerable Ajaan Mun without being

afraid that people will call me mad — because this arose from my own faith.

## *Return to the Northeast*

Venerable Ajaan Khao spent the *vassa* of 1945-1946 in Mae Nong Harn, Sunsai district, Chiang Mai province. During the *vassa* he kindly gave a number of Dhamma talks to teach and instil faith into the people there. By that time, his *citta* had already gone free from the thick jungle and emerged into the land of boundless wide-open space. His *citta* had become a ‘space *citta*’ and his Dhamma had become ‘space Dhamma’, both of them interfused into one in complete fulfilment. Nothing ever came to obstruct and deceive him like it used to. He continued his normal daily activities for the sake of maintaining the body and the *khandhas* so that the Dhamma dwelling place (*vihāra-dhamma*) of the *citta* in this world (*ditṭha-dhamma*) would remain convenient and comfortable.

After the *vassa* he reflected back on his life before he set out to search for Dhamma and for the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna*, by way of the constant practice of *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna*. His past often came back to remind him of the promise which he had made soon after he was ordained. He had determined then that he would leave in order to search for the Dhamma in order to attain the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* and nothing else. When all the people and *ajans* opposed him and tried to stop him from going away, he then announced with complete sincerity that:

“After I have gone, if I have not experienced Dhamma — which is the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* — fully in my heart, I will not return to let you ridicule me as a failure to my face. This is my firm resolve. I will return only if I have this Dhamma as my guarantee. I would like all of you to understand now that it will be a long time before I return to see you again. By then, you may have forgotten what I just told you.”

When he had fully thought about it, he came to a definite decision and said farewell to all his friends and relatives who were attached to him and did not want him to go. But necessity compelled him to make a break with them, following the law of change which is bound to bring about separation between people, both while living and at death, so everyone has to accept this natural principle.

With that past incident fresh in his mind, Ajaan Khao asked Ajaan Waen Sujino to accompany him back to the north eastern region (Isahn) to visit his home village and all his friends and relatives who he had left twenty years ago. Should he wait any longer, he was concerned that either he or they might die before there was a chance to meet again. Also, were he to go now, he would have a very good opportunity to visit and pay his respects to Venerable Ajaan Mun Bhūridatta, who at that time was spending the *vassa* in Nong Pheu Nanai village in the Pannananikon district of Sakon Nakhon province — an area where many *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhus* lived and practised.

But Ajaan Waen said that he would not go back as long as he had still not attained the level of *Arahant*, which was the goal that he was fully intent on achieving. He felt that he had to stay put and go on developing until he reached his goal.

Then he could leave Chiang Mai and go elsewhere if he wanted to. But if he did not want to go anywhere, he would go on living in Chiang Mai until he died. He told Ajaan Khao:

“As for you, if you have attained *Arahantship* it would be very good if you spread the Dhamma among the Bhikkhus and villagers – to that I give my full approval and blessing. But please don’t bring out the *kilesas* and false Dhamma to spread about to other people, because the *kilesas* and false Dhamma are abundant everywhere where people live in this world. In fact, they are never lacking in the hearts of those living in the world nowadays. For that reason, the world is full of trouble and turbulence and unable to find calm and peace either in body or mind. Wherever we go we hear nothing but complaints that life is full of suffering and difficulty, full of hardships and deprivations. Even in the villages and towns where they reckon that they are experiencing progress and development, we still hear complaints about suffering and difficulty.

“So when you go to the northeastern region, please teach Dhamma that is correct and complete, not lacking in any way; Dhamma that is calming and peaceful, not complaining and agitated. This is what you should take to give to them, so that your relatives and friends will all be full of gratitude and joy that you have come to visit.

“At present I am still fighting against the false Dhamma which makes me intoxicated. I haven’t yet sobered up. I’m intoxicated while sitting, standing, walking and lying down. When sitting in *samādhi*, I’m intoxicated; walking *caṅkama bhāvanā*, I’m intoxicated. The *kilesas* that lead me into care-less intoxication are still not ready to get off my shoulders, my back, my neck and my heart. However I twist and turn about,

the intoxicating *kilesas* continue to do their work, interfering with all my actions of body, speech and mind. I have no way of knowing when I will be able to cure these intoxicants.

“But please go to Isahn and teach them about *madanimmadano* — that Dhamma which causes intoxicants to abate; *vaṭṭupacchedo* — that Dhamma which cuts out the worldly *citta*; *tanhākkhayo* — that Dhamma which destroys craving; *virāgo* — that Dhamma which is the end of *rāga*<sup>1</sup>, the pleasure of excitement; *nirodho* — that Dhamma which quenches all the *kilesas*; *Nibbāna* — the final and complete destruction of all the *kilesas* and the relative world of appearance. Go and spread these *dhammas* about in the monasteries and villages. People will be very glad and show their appreciation to you who have been away for such a long time.”

That’s what Ajaan Waen told Ajaan Khao when he was about to return to Isahn. Ajaan Waen did not accompany him, for he wanted to develop his practice until he attained the state of *Arahant* first. He had to put off any travel plans until after he had reached the goal that his heart was set on. So, instead, Ajaan Khao asked Ajaan Chob and Ajaan Butra to accompany him. Then the three of them left Chiang Mai and began walking cross-country to Isahn, where they intended first to pay their respects to Venerable Ajaan Mun at Wat Baan Nong Pheu in the district of Nanai, Sakon Nakhon province. The night before they reached there they stopped to rest for the night. While Ajaan Khao was doing his meditation practice, he thought reverently of Venerable Ajaan Mun, reflecting in his heart how at that time Ajaan Mun was probably sitting in meditation and looking right into their hearts and minds,

seeing everything quite clearly throughout. Ajaan Khao suspected that even before they had reached him, there was probably nothing within their hearts that Ajaan Mun had not found out with his super-knowing *ñāṇa*.

It was rather amazing that what he thought turned out to be true. For when they got there and met Venerable Ajaan Mun, he gave them an important talk on Dhamma, saying:

“Being afraid that other people will look into your heart and mind, rather than being concerned about looking into your own heart and mind to see what’s there, is simply wasting your time dreaming and thinking externally while having no interest in thinking about going into your own body and mind. Where else can we who practise the way find the ability to be circum-spect? Those who practise so as to know the basic principles of truth must look at themselves and their own hearts – the major cause of all problems – far more than looking at things outside themselves. They must also find a method of guarding themselves and their hearts by being careful and watchful in all postures and situations. They must use their mindfulness and wisdom to recollect and learn from their past experience, so they can think about and work out how to deal with each incident that they meet up with. They must not be careless and indifferent with anything in the sphere of the relative world of convention, which is nothing but the sphere of *dukkha*, the sphere of birth and death of all beings in the world.”

After having rested and listened to Venerable Ajaan Mun’s Dhamma, which gave them a feeling of uplift and joy, they saluted him and took their leave. They then went wandering

in the vicinity of Ajaan Mun's forest monastery to find solitude, practising the way of *Kammaṭṭhāna* in places such as Baan Koke Manao and Baan Gut Baak in Gut Baak district, Sakon Nakhon province. They promoted their striving in Dhamma continuously in that area for several months, after which they all set off to go to Ajaan Khao's home village.

When they reached his home village where he was born and grew up, all the people there, including his relatives and friends, were very happy and elated to hear about his arrival. They asked him to have *mettā* for them by spending the next *vassa* period there. When he agreed, they built a hut for him to stay the *vassa* at Bor Chaneng – which was the name of his home village.

After the *vassa* period, Ajaan Khao said farewell to all his relatives and friends and returned to Sakon Nakhon province. There he went wandering in various districts where there were forests and hills which were suitable for practising the way of *Samaṇa-dhamma*, such as the foothills of Phu Pan and Phu Lek ranges in the district of Sawang Daen Din. He spent several *vassa* periods in that area: one year at Nong Luang village, another at Thum Ped, another at Wai Sanoi village and another at Chum Pon village, all of which are within the boundaries of the district of Sawang Daen Din, Sakon Nakhon province. He had a few Bhikkhus and novices with him, but not many, because he did not want a lot of people following him around. It would have been too disturbing and too difficult to find suitable places to stay and practice, as well as being difficult to gather food on *piṇḍapāta*. He preferred staying near small villages composed of not more than five, six or seven houses, as this provided the most suitable conditions for the

way of *Samaṇa-dhamma* by avoiding the disturbances of a large crowd of Bhikkhus and novices constantly coming and going as he had found in the larger villages and monasteries he had seen.

AJAAN KHAO WAS SO ABSOLUTELY RESOLUTE and resourceful in striving that it would be hard to find anyone else to equal him. When it came to striving in the way of Dhamma, even in old age he still remained very skilled and resolute without weakening. When he walked *caṅkama*, he continued for five or six hours each time before taking a rest. Even the young Bhikkhus could not equal him. The striving of the wisest men is so very different from that of the rest of us, who tend to look forward more to the time when we can rest our heads on our pillows. As if pillows are more exalted than the Path, Fruition and *Nibbāna* – which, when one looks at it and thinks about it, should make us ashamed of how clever we are in those ways that are completely lacking in essential value.

### *Visions of Ajaan Mun*

For several years Venerable Ajaan Khao spent the *vassa* period living in the hills alone, relying on two or three families of farmers to give him food when he went out on *piṇḍapāta* each day. For those who are ordained as Bhikkhus, this type of life provides the most happiness and peace of heart in the practice of Dhamma. Since there are no other burdens or duties

to trouble one, all one's time is filled with the effort to practise the way. One's time is always one's own; one's effort is one's own in every situation; and the *citta* with Dhamma is one's own in all that one does. There is nothing distracting to divide one's attention, causing it to deteriorate. A Bhikkhu who lives in the present, as if tonight is the only night left to him, is not concerned with how much longer he is going to live, or with other distractions, for what he is doing is of incomparably greater value than anything else.

Venerable Ajaan Khao said that when he spent the *vassa* period by himself in the hills along the borders of Sakon Nakhon and Kalasin provinces, he lived in a place three or four miles distant from the nearest village. Many wild animals roamed that district, including tigers, elephants, wild oxen, red bulls, wild boar, barking deer and various other kinds of deer. At night he used to hear these animals' calls echoing through the forest as they roamed in search of food, often coming close to where he was staying. Sometimes they came so close that he could almost make out what kind of animal it was. Seeing these animals made him feel joyful, with *mettā* and compassion for them.

It was soon after Venerable Ajaan Mun died that Ajaan Khao spent the *vassa* period in those hills. He said that when he practised *samādhi* meditation during that period, Ajaan Mun came to visit him regularly in his meditation to talk about Dhamma and give him 'friendly Dhamma advice' (*sammodaniya-dhamma*). When doing his routine duties in the vicinity of the cave where he stayed, or when arranging his few possessions, if he did anything improperly, Ajaan Mun would point it out to him in his *samādhi* meditation every time.

For that reason, it seemed as though he was living with Ajaan Mun for the whole of that *vassa* period.

Ajaan Mun came into his meditation and told him about the customs and traditions of *Dhutanga Bhikkhus* who are intent on attaining freedom. He emphasised that the various *dhutanga* observances should be maintained and done properly in the way that the Lord Buddha prescribed – they should not be altered. Then he talked about the *dhutanga* practices that he taught his disciples to follow while he was still alive, repeating what he said for emphasis thus:

“Throughout my life right up to the end I taught my disciples to observe those *dhutanga* practices which I knew about with certainty – without any doubt at all. So you should take them to heart and practise them with a full and complete commitment. You should never think that the *Sāsana* is the exclusive property of the Lord Buddha or any of his *Sāvaka* disciples. For, in fact, the *Sāsana* belongs to whoever cherishes it and is interested enough to practise the way, which includes everyone who aims to gain value from the *Sāsana*. The Lord Buddha and all the *Sāvakas* retained no part of the *Sāsana* which they gave fully and freely to the world. You should not think that the Lord and the *Sāvakas* would dispense both parts which were good as well as parts which were bad or tainted. Whether we practise the way rightly or wrongly is entirely up to each one of us – in no way does it depend on the Lord Buddha and the *Sāvakas*.

“You have come here with the specific purpose to practise the way. Whether you practise rightly or wrongly is also entirely up to you. So you must be very careful in what you do so as to live contentedly in the Dhamma of one who has seen the truth.

You will shortly become an *ācariya* with many followers, so you must set a good example to show what is right and seemly in order to be an exalted symbol of righteousness and truth and a blessing to all who follow after you – so that those who follow you will not be disappointed. Being an *ācariya* is a very important position, so you should examine what it means carefully. For if the *ācariya* himself goes wrong, he may also lead many others in the wrong direction. But if he does what is right, he can equally lead countless others in the right direction. You should therefore carefully examine all aspects of what it means to be an *ācariya* with many followers. Others will then have an unobstructed, smooth path to follow, which will not be false because you, as their *ācariya*, taught them wrongly.

“The word ‘*ācariya*’ means one who trains and develops his behaviour, which is displayed externally in his actions and manners, in such a way that those who depend on him can hold him up as an example to be followed. His should not be the kind of behaviour that displays falsehood due to a lack of prior thought and consideration. The Lord Buddha, who we call the *Sāsadā* – the Great Teacher of the world – was not the *Sāsadā* only at those times when he was giving a talk on Dhamma to Buddhists who came to listen to him. He was the *Sāsadā* at all times, in every situation and position, whether reclining on his right side in the ‘Lion posture’, sitting, standing or walking about. Even when he was within a Buddhist monastery, the Lord would still be the *Sāsadā* in every action and every movement he made, never doing anything that was uncharacteristic of the *Sāsadā*. Therefore, anyone who has mindfulness and wisdom and an inclination towards critical assessment and contemplation can always take every move-

ment and every gesture that the Lord made as a teaching and a moral example.

“You should not think that the Lord ever behaved in an unrestrained manner, like worldly people who like to adjust and change their behaviour depending on the people and circumstances that they come across. For they behave like this in one place and act like that in another – which is the characteristic behaviour of ghosts and *pretas*. There are both good people and bad people all over the world who do not have enough of a presence within them to hold on to as a firm, stable principle, so they cannot be a source of stability to others. Unlike worldly people, the Lord Buddha was the Great Teacher in everything he did right up to the day of final *Nibbāna*. Whatever action or characteristic he displayed, he was always the *Sāsadā*, never being deficient or incapable. So whoever holds to him as a ‘refuge’ – which means a basic principle or example of how one should act and behave – can do so at any time in whatever they are doing, by following his example, without any doubt as to whether the example of the Lord is suited to that occasion or not. This is why the title of the ‘Great Teacher of the triple world system’ – *Sāsadā* – is well suited to the Lord.

“When the Lord was about to enter *Parinibbāna*, he did so in the ‘Lion posture’. He did not lie down carelessly, as though he had thrown away his limbs and body, afraid of death and repeating mantras and magical verses so that he would go to this or that realm of existence – which is the way of ordinary people everywhere in the world. But he died composed, in the ‘Lion posture’, and entered *Parinibbāna*. Meanwhile, his heart went through the process of ‘entering *Nibbāna*’ with

unwavering courage and discipline — as though he were about to go on living in the world for a long time to come. Actually the Lord proclaimed that he was the Great Teacher in those final moments by entering the *Jhānas* and *Nirodha Samāpatti*<sup>2</sup> and then withdrawing from them when the right moment came to enter *Parinibbāna*, fully confirming his status as the Great Teacher without any remaining attachments to anything in the three worlds of existence. In this way, from the moment of his enlightenment to the time of his *Parinibbāna*, the Lord Buddha made his behaviour an example for the whole world to follow. He never reduced his standards of behaviour below those required of the Great Teacher, behaving in any way like ordinary, worldly people. He dutifully maintained his position of perfection right to the end.

“You should therefore take up the example of the *Sāsadā* and put it into practice. Although you will not be able to match the perfection of the Lord in all respects, your behaviour will still be in the category of one who follows the word of the Teacher — not drifting uncontrolled like a boat adrift in a storm in the middle of the ocean that has not put out its anchor. The practice of a monk who has no correct, firmly-established principles within him is likely to lack any real purpose that enables him to determine whether he will reach a safe shore, or whether he will meet various dangers ahead. He is like a boat without a rudder that is not likely to be able to take him where he wants to go. Consequently, he is bound to drift with the ocean currents, which can easily lead him into great danger.

“The basic principles of Dhamma and *Vinaya*, such as the *dhutanga* observances, are the ‘rudders’ of the practice, which lead it to a safe goal. Because of that, you should take hold of

them and grasp them firmly. You must not waver or vacillate, which would lead those who follow you to follow a bad example and go wrong accordingly. The *dhutanga* observances are the practices which proceed directly towards the goal – no other practice can equal them in this. If those who practice the *dhutangas* use mindfulness, wisdom, faith and effort in their striving, then that Dhamma which they are hoping to attain should be well within the scope of these practices. As they have been handed down to us by the Lord Buddha, it is quite certain that they are capable of leading us to success without any doubts or obstacles being able to prevent us. The *dhutanga* observances are the only way that can lead us beyond *dukkha*. There is no other way, so you should not feel uncertain or doubtful. The *dhutangas* are the place where all the methods of practice converge and lead into the process of quenching all *dukkha*.

“Those Bhikkhus who prefer the *dhutanga* observances as their mode of development are those who are faithful to the teaching of the Lord Buddha, who was the First Teacher. Those Bhikkhus who have taken up the *dhutanga* observances as their path of practice are those who have proper restraint, with the Buddha as their refuge in all situations. Wherever they go or stay they have Dhamma to help protect them as a substitute for the *Sāsadā*. They are not lonely, aimless or unstable, for the heart’s principle is the principle of Dhamma, and the principle of Dhamma is identical with the heart. Breathing in and breathing out is Dhamma, which is intimately blended into a single unity with the heart. Such people are always living with Dhamma, never being disturbed or biased.

“For yourself, it is true that you do not have anything to worry about in terms of Dhamma. But many people will associate with you in the future, so you must have concern for all those who follow you, both fellow monks and lay people as well, so that they may feel confident that the practices they have picked up from you are the correct way to make progress without mistake.”

This was how Venerable Ajaan Mun taught Ajaan Khao as he sat in meditation. If he slept over the time for him to wake, even just a little, Ajaan Mun would come and point it out to him, saying:

“Don’t trust yourself more than Dhamma, for ‘yourself’ is really just the round of *samsāra*. The elements of the body and the *khandhas* are results that have come from the round of *samsāra*, right from the beginning. You should only give way to the *khandhas* to the extent that is necessary — but you must not give way to them more than you have to. Doing so goes against the basic nature of a Bhikkhu who is never complacent. For those who are truly wise, lying down to sleep is only for the purpose of giving a temporary relief to the physical body. They do not expect to gain pleasure or contentment from resting to relieve the tiredness and weakness of the physical *khandha*. The Bhikkhu who lies down as a Bhikkhu should, must be careful to remind himself of the time to get up — like a deer that lies down to rest while roaming for food must be more mindful and careful than normal. To ‘lie down properly’<sup>3</sup> means to carefully set up mindfulness before going to sleep, making the resolve to get up at a predetermined time — not lying down in the manner of one who auctions off his goods as though they

are worthless, letting the customer give whatever he feels like giving for them. The Bhikkhu who lies down and lets his body go however it will is not a Son of the *Sākya* – a Buddhist who guards the religion, promoting it in himself and in others – but a Bhikkhu who auctions everything off arbitrarily, letting the buyer fix the price.

“To lie down properly in the manner of a Bhikkhu who is endowed with *sīla* and Dhamma as religious duties, a Bhikkhu must have a regular procedure that he follows before going to sleep. This habit makes him careful and self-possessed when he lies down to sleep. As soon as he wakes he must get up quickly, and not linger in bed – which is the way of a lazy person who tends to get up late, and who dies immersed in careless indifference, never waking enough to become aware of himself. Lying down like this is the way of a worthless animal, or of a lazy person who destroys whatever value he has and is unable to rise up and improve himself. Since such behaviour is not the way of the *Sāsana*, it should not be encouraged; or else it will become a ‘parasite creeper’ growing within the *Sāsana* and within the whole company of *Dhutanga Bhikkhus*. It can easily destroy you, just as a ‘parasite creeper’ destroys the tree on which it depends. You should think about and compare the two concepts of ‘lying down properly’ and ‘lying down in the usual way’. Compare them and search out where they differ, for the ‘lying down properly’ of a Son of the *Sākya* is very different from the ordinary ‘lying down’ of people and animals everywhere. Therefore, the Sons of the *Sākya* feel that to ‘lie down properly’ each and every time they rest has a special significance which remains close to their hearts all the time. This is appropriate for one who maintains mindfulness and who has the wisdom to use thought and

contemplation in everything that he does. Not merely thinking any old way, or speaking any old way, or acting any old way; not merely lying down, waking up, eating, standing, walking or sitting down any old way. All such negligent behaviour fails to live up to the standard of someone who has the status of a Son of the *Sākya*, who should never act in those ways.

“It is generally understood by people that after the Lord Buddha and each of the *Sāvaka Arahants* had entered final *Nibbāna*, they disappeared into oblivion and no longer had any meaning or relationship to the rest of us. But the Dhamma, which is the basic causal condition that teaches us to practise in the present, is this not the Dhamma of the one who dug deep, searched and brought it up for the world to see and to follow in practice? And the whole body of this Dhamma, how did it remain, and why did it not go into oblivion also? The fact is that both the ‘Buddha’ and ‘Sangha’ are the pure heart that has naturally transcended the limits of both death and annihilation. How could the pure *citta* die, be consigned to oblivion or become meaningless when its very nature does not accord with relative convention (*sammuti*)? When its nature no longer accords with relative convention, it is not subject to dying, or to being annihilated, or becoming meaningless. Thus, Buddha is Buddha in its own right; Dhamma is Dhamma in its own right; and Sangha is Sangha in its own right; and they are not shaken or influenced by any of the concepts of the relative world of conventions, which use their authority to create harmful ideas and attitudes within us. So, the whole time that we practise ‘Dhamma which accords with Dhamma’<sup>47</sup> within the heart, it is like coming face to face with the Lord Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha at that time. When we know

Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha by natural principles, that knowing must arise in the heart, which is the most suitable dwelling place for Dhamma – no other vessel is more appropriate to it.”

This is an example of the teaching with which Venerable Ajaan Mun admonished Ajaan Khao in his *samādhi* meditation practice when he saw that he had erred in some way; for instance, when he practised the *dhutanga* observances incorrectly or not strictly enough, or when he woke from sleep at the wrong time.

In truth, Ajaan Mun did not admonish him because he was convinced that he had done something wrong. Rather, he admonished him because he could see that in the future Ajaan Khao would be associated with many Bhikkhus and large numbers of lay people. For that reason, he often advised and admonished him so that he would become fully conscious of the strict ways of practising a monk’s duties. Then he would be able to pass them on to all the other Bhikkhus and novices who come to live in dependence on him. And they in turn would gain something worthwhile to take away with them, just as Ajaan Mun’s disciples had always done.

Venerable Ajaan Mun also taught him that all his possessions, such as the bowl, kettle, robes and other things that he used in his dwelling, should be neatly put away in their proper place. This also included such things as the rags for wiping his feet. Seeing that any of them were not clean enough, he should wash them before putting them to further use. After use, everything should be neatly put away, and not just left lying about all over the place. On any day that Ajaan Khao

became so absorbed in other affairs that intruded into his life that he became forgetful or careless, a vision of Ajaan Mun would come to him in the middle of the night while he was practising *samādhi* meditation, admonishing him and pointing out the way of Dhamma to him.

HE STAYED ALONE IN THAT CAVE for the whole of the *vassa* period. At night he was frequently visited by Venerable Ajaan Mun who appeared in his meditation practice as a *nimitta*<sup>5</sup>. Sometimes sitting in meditation in the middle of the day when it was very quiet, he also saw Ajaan Mun come to visit him in the same way as he did at night. He said that it was very pleasurable for him to be able to ask Ajaan Mun all sorts of questions to make his understanding quite clear. Ajaan Mun was very proficient at answering questions with great skill and dexterity. He made the answer so clear as to remove all doubt and uncertainty every time. With some questions, Ajaan Khao had only a feeling of uncertainty, but he did not actually think of asking about it. Nonetheless, at night when he did his meditation practice, Ajaan Mun would come and bring up that question for discussion, as though he had just asked him about it. Ajaan Khao said it was truly strange and wonderful – but he could not tell anyone else because they would probably pass him off as a ‘mad *kammaṭṭhāna* monk’. Mostly, the Dhamma for curing the various *kilesas* arose from *nimittas* in *samādhi* meditation, such as those of Ajaan Mun coming frequently to admonish him, to show him the right way and to give him Dhamma teaching. This promoted his mindfulness

and wisdom, making him think and consider carefully, leaving no room for carelessness.

In marked contrast to all other places he had lived, the *vassa* period that he spent in that cave in the desolate jungle enabled him to develop various skilful methods, both internally and externally, which arose very frequently at all times of the day and night. Ajaan Khao was someone who lived in the present<sup>6</sup> with joy in Dhamma in all postures and situations. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, he was filled with the bliss of Dhamma in the midst of the peaceful Dhamma that was the original foundation of his pure *citta*, which was completely pure amidst the various kinds of phenomena that made contact with the heart, displaying their meanings in various ways. The bliss of Dhamma refreshed his body and mind, making them joyful; like a tree being cared for and supplied with fertiliser and water, and growing in a suitable climate and environment, which always keeps it fresh and moist both in the trunk and throughout all its branches, twigs, leaves and fruit.

Ajaan Khao said that when the *citta* remains only in the present with the calm and peace of Dhamma, then regardless of how much we get involved in things that are confusing and distracting, we still have nothing but happiness while living in the world of involvement with our own *khandhas*. We need not struggle to find happiness and contentment in other places or other realms – which is merely creating images to deceive ourselves, causing us to develop a strong craving (*taṇhā*) which promotes the Cause of *Dukkha* that becomes the fuel which burns us and causes us so much misery. The happiness that is known and experienced in the heart is a happiness which is already sufficient and complete. Then, this entire world and

all other worlds, however many there may be in the universe of *samsāra*, appear not to exist. That which does exist, and which is quite clear and apparent, is the *citta* with Dhamma which seems to cover the whole universe — though it is impossible to explain this or compare it to anything, because there are no characteristics or data by which one can classify it. The *citta* that possesses the Ultimate Dhamma — *Acchariya Dhamma* — does not exist within the realms of convention, so there is no basis for making any comparisons or suppositions.

### *Living with Tigers*

After the end of that *vassa* period, some faithful lay supporters from Sawang Daen Din in Sakon Nakhon province travelled to the cave to invite him to return with them and kindly be their teacher. So he was obliged to leave the place where he had been staying, even though he longed to remain there as he had not thought of going elsewhere for a long time. Having taught the villagers for some time, he took leave of them and went wandering wherever he felt like going in the manner of *Dhutanga Kammaṭṭhāna Bhikkhu*. Sometimes he crossed the Mekong River into Laos, where he stayed on the banks of the river. Later he crossed back into Thailand and continued wandering and practising the way in Dong Mor Tong, a mountainous area covered with thick jungle which straddles the districts of Bung Kan and Phon Phisai. In that area were many good places suitable for practising the way. There were also some newly established villages made up of only a few houses. The

people in those villages invited him to spend the *vassa* there for their benefit. As it was a place that suited his temperament, he agreed to stay there for the *vassa* period.

While he was staying and practising Dhamma in the hills of the Phon Phisai district, he was fascinated and glad at heart to see all the different kinds of animals living there, for whom he had much *mettā*. The animals he saw included: wild fowl, pheasant, all sorts of birds like hornbill and peacock, as well as animals like the palm civet, barking deer, wild boar, ordinary deer, monkeys of various kinds, gibbon apes, wild dogs, tigers, leopards, elephants, wild oxen and red bulls. He saw far more of each of those species there than he had seen anywhere else. There were herds of them roaming everywhere. Day and night, he could hear their cries echoing loudly through the forest, each group according to its own natural rhythm.

Some days when he went out walking for *piṇḍapāta*, he saw a large tiger walking most gracefully in the forest ahead of him. It was quite close to him, walking fearlessly, proud and dignified as is its nature. When there was a clearing in the forest ahead of him, it was beautiful to see the way it walked. The first time he saw the tiger, it glanced at him just momentarily and went on walking without looking back at him again, as though it was not in the least afraid of him. But inwardly it was probably careful and watchful, which is in character for an animal that has good mindfulness and is inherently cautious — it does not easily relax and make a mistake. As for Ajaan Khao, he had no thought of fear for the tiger because he had seen them before on many occasions. He had heard them growling and roaring so often while staying in the forests that he travelled through,

where it was quite normal for such animals to live, that he was quite accustomed to them and had no fear of them.

One evening during the *vassa* as he sat teaching the way of *Kammaṭṭhāna* to the several Bhikkhus staying with him, he heard three large striped tigers roaring in the distance, each one in a different direction. After a while he heard them growling threateningly and fighting with each other. Then they went completely quiet. Later he heard them growling and fighting close by. In the beginning, he heard them playing and fighting outside the area where the Bhikkhus were staying. When they subsequently went quiet, he thought they had moved on somewhere else. But that wasn't the case, for at about 9 p.m. they approached the small meeting hall (*sālā*) where the Bhikkhus were sitting in *samādhī*, listening to the Dhamma teaching, and crawled into the space under the floor. The floor of the *sālā* was raised just over one meter above the ground, and the sound of these tigers roaring and growling and fighting there together was so disrupting that Ajaan Khao had to shout at them, saying:

“Hey! My three friends! Don't make such a noise! The Bhikkhus are listening to a talk on Dhamma. Doing evil like this could land you in hell — don't say I didn't warn you! This is not the right place to cause a commotion, so you should all go away and roar elsewhere. This is a monastery for Bhikkhus who like to develop calm — unlike you — so go roar to your heart's content somewhere else where nobody will interfere with you. Here the Bhikkhus practise the way of Dhamma and they do not give you permission to make a lot of noise and disturbance.”

As soon as they heard Ajaan Khao shouting at them, they went quiet and still for a short while, but he could still hear them, as if they were whispering to each other quietly under the *sālā*, saying: “We better not make much noise, the Bhikkhus are annoyed and shouting at us, so we must talk quietly or else it will be bad and we may soon end up with sores on our heads.” But after a while they again started growling and playfully fighting each other. They did not seem to want to go elsewhere, as Ajaan Khao had told them to do. It seemed as though they had all agreed that under the floor of the *sālā* was the place for them to play and have fun from dusk until midnight, when they finally went away. Meanwhile, after Ajaan Khao had finished his teaching, the Bhikkhus remained sitting there doing their *samādhi* practice while the three large tigers played, fighting and growling and making a lot of noise under the *sālā*, until they went back into the forest at midnight. Only then did the Bhikkhus return to their individual dwelling places.

This incident was most strange and unusual. For many years Ajaan Khao had wandered in the way of *Kammaṭṭhāna* through forested areas in many different parts of the country, but he had never before seen or heard of tigers coming so close to people in a friendly manner, as if they had been close friends of the Bhikkhus for a long time. Normally, tigers are instinctively afraid of people, even though they are so powerful that they make people more afraid of them than almost any other animal. In general, tigers are more afraid of people than people are of tigers, so they avoid people and keep away from them. Yet these three tigers were not only unafraid of people, they even went to the extent of taking possession of the space under the floor of the small *sālā* to play and have fun together while

a lot of Bhikkhus were gathered right above them. Apparently, they were not in the least afraid of the Bhikkhus, who were human beings just like people everywhere. This was quite remarkable, for such animals know nothing of morality, which all people know about, yet their behaviour in coming into close proximity to the Bhikkhus made it look almost as though they had a good understanding of morality, which they put into practice in the way that people do. They never once displayed any menacing behaviour towards the Bhikkhus, although they probably did so towards each other in the knowledge that they all understood what their intentions were.

Even though it took place a long time ago, I felt as if my hair was standing on end with fear while I listened to Ajaan Khao telling me about this incident – which was rather silly. Foolish, silly people are like that: even if the *ajans* tell them stories which have a moral lessons of Dhamma buried in them, foolish and incompetent people are unlikely to listen for the purpose of extracting the moral principles from it. Instead, they show their lack of intelligence by focusing just on the story-line itself. Like myself, who showed fear shamelessly in front of Ajaan Khao while listening to his story. In addition, in writing this book I am also displaying my timidity for those who read it to laugh at me – which is bad enough! So, having read this, please be careful not to let this kind of story penetrate your heart and haunt it, or else many of you are likely to become timid and silly people also!

Most of the Bhikkhus who sat in meditation listening to Ajaan Khao teaching that night were stirred up and frightened, both while they sat there and after they left the *sālā*. Their eyes and ears were wide open when they heard the ‘three great

teachers' crawl under the *sālā* to help Ajaan Khao teach them a lesson. When their sense of contentment was confronted by their fear of tigers, the Bhikkhus sitting there were scared stiff. They did not dare to let their *cittas* wander out freely, for fear that those three teachers might decide to jump up onto the floor of the *sālā* and give them 'instructions'.

Actually the behaviour of the three tigers was praiseworthy in that they did nothing unreasonably excessive or violent, such as leaping onto the floor of the *sālā*. They knew what their basic situation in life was, and to some extent, what that of the Bhikkhus was, and they did not go beyond what was proper for them in their situation. Their activities were all gentle and harmonious – then they simply went away. After that they never returned, although the district where the Bhikkhus were staying was a place where tigers and all sorts of other animals roamed freely. There was never a night without some tigers wandering about the area, because it was a most suitable living environment for all sorts of wild animals. That whole mountainous area was covered with thick forest so extensive that it would take a person many days to walk all the way through it. Many varieties of wild animals lived there in large numbers. There were many large herds of elephants and packs of wild boar – and they were not very afraid of people.

Many skilful teaching methods occurred to Ajaan Khao during the year that he lived in that mountainous region. He often had to warn the other Bhikkhus who were with him not to be careless in maintaining the *dhutanga* observances. He reminded them that they were living in an environment which made it necessary for them to be careful of many things. They had to depend on the *dhutanga* observances as their life-

line, and fully entrust their lives to the Dhamma and *Vinaya*. In that way, they could live happily without being scared and apprehensive of things in the natural environment that might otherwise have startled them.

Ajaan Khao and his disciples ate very little food — just enough to act as a ‘medicine’ to support their bodies and keep them going from day to day. The village they depended on for food was newly-built and had yet to become firmly-established, so they had very few lay supporters. But, because they had pledged themselves to Dhamma, those Bhikkhus intended to train themselves to put up with difficulties for the sake of the Dhamma of inner peace. So they were not much concerned about their living conditions, or about how much food they got on *piṇḍapāta*, for such concerns could easily become obstacles in the way of what they were trying to accomplish. As for medical remedies, they considered putting up with pain and fighting sickness by striving hard in *samādhi bhāvanā* to be the most effective cures. They considered the animals that lived in the surrounding forest to be their friends and took them as examples; for they never had any medicines available to them; nor were they born in a hospital with doctors and midwives to aid them. Yet there they were! Animals of all sorts, quite able to keep their family lines going, and in large numbers too! And they never showed any grief or discouragement at their lack of medical attention from doctors, nurses and all sorts of medicines and medical devices.

Bhikkhus are human beings. They are Sons of the *Sākya* — the Great Teacher — whose name resounds throughout the three worlds as one who learned everything there was to know in the ‘books’ of the three levels of existence by using his

endurance, effort, wisdom, skill and ability to the fullest. Never was he caught at a loss, unable to find a way out; nor was he ever weak and lazy and inclined to give up. If Bhikkhus retreat, shedding tears just because of the suffering and hardships of the aches and pains experienced in sickness, which are natural conditions of the *khandhas* anyway, they are bound to lose out and go ‘bankrupt’, and so will not be able to guide themselves or the religion properly. Unless they are courageous and firm in putting up with natural conditions – living and experiencing them all with mindfulness and wisdom to assess and know each and every event that they come into contact with – there is no way to save themselves and escape to a lasting safe haven.

When the *citta* has been trained in the right way, it will find joy in Dhamma. It will gladly guide a Bhikkhu to the right methods for attaining the Path and Fruition without changing course or creating obstacles to cause him more trouble. The practice of the way will then steadily progress without slipping backwards, so he won’t feel disheartened because he has no inner refuge. He will have the ‘heart with Dhamma’ to cleanse, to soothe and to protect him, causing him to feel peaceful and secure. Then wherever he goes or wherever he stays, he is inherently content – *sugato* – in the manner of true disciples of the *Tathāgata*, without any signs of impoverishment in his heart. Those *Dhutanga Kammatṭhāna Bhikkhus* who are intent on Dhamma go about and live their lives like this. They can stay anywhere and go anywhere, for they are prepared to put up with hardship and hunger while remaining contented and free from anxiety, with Dhamma as the object of attachment (*ārammaṇa*) of their hearts.

It may be difficult for the reader to accept some of the things that happen in connection with the forest animals that like to come and live close to Bhikkhus. So, to begin with, it may be better to consider domestic animals which people like to look after with *mettā* in their homes, and animals that seek sanctuary in the monasteries. The number of animals such as dogs and birds that want to live in monasteries increases every day, until there is hardly any room left for the dogs — or trees left for the birds.

Having thought about the domestic animals with which we are all familiar, we can go on to consider the various kinds of wild animals that tend to hang around the forest locales or the monasteries where *Dhutanga Bhikkhus* tend to stay. I have already written about such animals in the books “Biography of Venerable Ajaan Mun” and “Paṭipada”, where many incidents are related of animals coming to live near the Bhikkhus. All of which are experiences that I know to be true.

From the viewpoint of Dhamma, these stories are quite interesting, for Dhamma is the principle of nature that gives peace and happiness. And Dhamma treats all species equally, regardless of whether or not they actually understand what Dhamma is. There is something which manifests in the experience of all beings that they are happy to accept, something which no one dislikes. That something is the natural Dhamma which manifests as calm and happiness, as peace, as trust and confidence, as goodwill, as *mettā*, as affection and compassion, and as tolerance in which others are free to come or go as they will, without fear or danger. These are some of the things that flow from Dhamma. Animals of all kinds like it and readily accept it without any need to attend school to be

taught about it. The *citta* is far more compatible with the outflow of Dhamma than it is with the possession of external titles, rank or authority, which are like ornaments that increase one's self-importance, but can easily dissolve away and disappear depending on circumstances which are fickle and uncertain. Therefore, although animals don't really know what Dhamma is, they will tend to search on their own for those things which they naturally like and can readily accept; for instance, stray dogs staying in a monastery or wild animals living close by *Dhutanga Bhikkhus*. Animals instinctively understand that Dhamma – which means peace and security – is to be found in those places, so they search for it in their own way. Even people who've never shown any interest in Dhamma know those places which are secure and safe, and they enjoy relaxing and having fun in such places. They realise that it would not be safe to act like that in other places. This has been the case from ancient times to the present day.

This explanation should be sufficient to understand how Dhamma, and the places where people live and practise Dhamma, make animals and people everywhere feel confident and free from danger. So they tend to relax and dispense with their usual caution. There are even some who go so far as to forget themselves completely, without stopping to consider how other people feel about it, or whether their behaviour is appropriate for the religion, which is the treasure of the whole country. Even people like that know the difference between good and evil. They know the difference between good people and bad people, between good animals and bad animals, in the same way that people everywhere do. So they should think of others and how much they cherish their treasure, and they

should refrain from letting go of all restraint. Limits and bounds exist within which people and animals should remain, each in its own sphere. They should not mix up their modes of behaviour until they are all behaving in the same way, so one cannot tell which is which.

VENERABLE AJAAN KHAO had always liked wandering about the countryside searching for secluded places, so he frequently moved from one place to another. Even when staying in one locale, he liked to wander *dhutanga* through the surrounding forests and hills, frequently changing the place where he did his meditation. For example, he used a certain location as his base, but in the morning he would walk off somewhere else to do his practice. Then in the afternoon he would go to another place, and at night he would wander off to yet another place — all in the vicinity of his base. He also used to change the direction he went in, sometimes going far and sometimes close by. At times, he would change to another cave, moving from the cave which was his base, or he would go up to a rocky outcrop at the top of the mountain, returning to his base dwelling only late at night.

During the period when he was engaged in a fierce struggle with his defilements (*kilesas*), he preferred this style of practice because he found that when he changed his situation constantly, wisdom would arise all the time. Then none of the defilements were able to get a grip on him, because they were constantly up against the skilful means of mindfulness and wisdom which beat them into a corner, trapping them so that they could be forced out and got rid of time after time. If he stayed always in one

place, he would become accustomed to his surroundings and complacency would set in. But the *kilesas* would not become complacent. They would keep increasing regardless of what he was accustomed to. So he had to change about, altering his methods and his environment very frequently, in order to keep up with the deceptive tricks of the *kilesas*. For once they established themselves, they would accumulate and fight against him incessantly without ever taking time off for rest. If there was any respite from them, it was only in deep dreamless sleep; otherwise they were working all the time. Because of this, if he relaxed or weakened his efforts while striving to develop himself, putting off doing the practice and letting time slip by, it encouraged the ever-diligent *kilesas* to laugh at him. By changing locations and methods of practice very frequently, he could have some success in defeating the *kilesas*, which had no chance to feel satisfied that they were the sole master in charge.

His reasoning was most intriguing, and his practice was an excellent example for those who refuse to let the *kilesas* rise up and walk all over them due to an easygoing over-confidence that ruins every move that the *citta* makes.

VENERABLE AJAAN KHAO liked to wander in the districts of Phu Singh, Phu Wua, Phu Lanka, Dong Mor Tong; and in the districts of Amphur Seka and Amphur Phon Phisai in Nong Khai province; as well as Amphur Ban Phaeng in Nakhon Phanom province. These areas had plenty of mountains, such as Phu Singh, Phu Wua and Phu Lanka, which were all places suitable for the practice and development of Dhamma. But

they were far away from villages — too far to go *piṇḍapāta* — so it was necessary to have people take turns bringing him food. All these places were full of wild animals of all sorts, including tigers, elephants, wild gaur and red oxen, among many others. In the afternoon and evening he could hear their calls and roars echoing throughout the forest. Anyone who had not truly overcome death would find it difficult to stay there, because there were many tigers in those places, far more than in other regions, and they were not afraid of people.

Some nights as he walked in meditation, one of the tigers would creep up and crouch down to watch him walking, without any fear of him at all. But it never harmed him. It may have simply wondered what he was up to, so it crept close to sniff and have a look. As soon as Ajaan Khao heard an unusual sound that made him suspicious, he would shine his flashlight there, only to see a great tiger leap away, sometimes very close in front of him. Even after that he was able to go on walking *caṅkama*, doing his meditation without any fear that the tiger might return to jump on him, maul him and eat him. His faith in Dhamma was stronger than his fear of the tiger, so he was able to persist and keep on doing his practice.

Sometimes in the evening he would climb up the hillside, from where he could see large herds of elephants going for a walk along a large area of rocky outcrops that stretched for miles. As the rocky area was not covered by forest, he could quite clearly see both large and small elephants going out to search for food. While watching those elephant herds having fun teasing each other and playing together, he became quite happily absorbed until the evening was late and it got too dark

to see. It seems they liked to tease each other and play together in the same way as people do.