The Ways of the Peaceful

Teachings about “Samana-Dhamma”, the virtues of a Buddhist monk

by Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo
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Information about the Ajahn Chah Tradition

for more teachings of the Ajahn Chah Tradition in English (and other languages) please see:


The list of also includes the first of Luang Por Liem’s books, “No Worries – Buddhist teachings and a short biography of Luang Por Liem Thithadhammo”.

Visitors to Thailand interested in taking up monastic life in the Ajahn Chah Tradition are welcome to contact Wat Pah Nanachat. “The International Forest Monastery”:

Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai
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The monastic training at the Wat Pah Nanachat begins with becoming an Anagarika (a homeless one), observing the eight precepts for several months, then becoming a Samenera (novice) for about one year. One may then take full ordination as a Bhikkhu (monk) with Luang Por Liem at Wat Nong Pah Pong. The training is mainly done in English language at Wat Pah Nanachat, but also at Wat Nong Pah Pong and its various branch monasteries in Thailand. Those interested in ordination in Europe, Australia, the US and other countries, should contact one of the overseas branch monasteries of Wat Nong Pah Pong via their websites. Conatact information may be found at:

www.forestsangha.org
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“The Ways of the Peaceful” is one of the many possible renderings of the term “Samana-Dhamma”, an expression that summarizes the whole lifestyle of a Buddhist monk. “Samana” means somebody who is peaceful. Generally in the time of the Buddha all kinds of recluses, ascetics, contemplatives, and members of ordained communities living the life of a homeless practitioner (anagarika) were referred to as “Samanas”. The Buddhas disciples were often called the “Samanas of Gotama” or the “Samanas of the Sakyan clan”, using the Buddhas family and clan names. Whenever the aspect of celibacy of these religious practitioners is stressed, the term “brahmachariya” is used, which translates in short as “Holy Life”. The Buddha himself called his monks “Bhikkhus”. This literally means “one who goes for alms”, but in the Thai Forest Tradition a second translation is popular: “Those who see the danger in the round of rebirth”. Besides the specific monastic code that the Buddha established for his monks (the “Vinaya”, with its 227 major training rules and countless minor rules), that spells out the conduct of a Buddhist monk in great detail, there was a general understanding of the etiquette, the virtues and qualities of a Samana, a peaceful ascetic. This is the “Samana-Dhamma”. It refers to these general virtues more than to the details of the training rules, but in fact the daily life of a monk is always a combination of both, in the same way
as the Buddha always used the words Dhamma and Vinaya as a pair when he talked about his dispensation.

This compilation of teachings centers on the routines, practices and aspirations that form the life of a monastic community, the Sangha, a practiced in the Thai Forest Tradition in the present day and age. Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo is one of the living teachers of this tradition. He was entrusted with the leadership of the famous forest monastery Wat Nong Pah Pong in Ubon Rachathani, Northeastern Thailand, by Luang Por Chah, who is well known in Thailand and abroad for his unique style of teaching this all encompassing way of life and meditation to both Thai and western monks. Presently, Luang Por Liem keeps this emphasis on training monks alive, ranging from mastering the details of daily life to very profound insights into the universal truths of life that the Buddha taught.
In this book, besides general outlines of monastic aspiration and its practice in daily life, some material on the ordination ceremony, called the "Going Forth" from the household life to the homeless life is included. Some of the talks of the Thai edition called “Samana-Dhamma”, some talks have been condensed, as some parts are only of interest to those who know Thailand well.

We hope that the teachings presented in this volume will serve as an introduction to areas of Dhamma practice that are usually only accessible to monks. May they inspire those that are interested in taking up monastic life to do so, and those who are already monks, to continue to train themselves in the Ways of the Peaceful.

With best wishes in the Samana-Dhamma,

The Translators

(Wat Nong Pah Pong, June 2007)

A note on the second edition

In the course of correcting some errors of the first edition, we found that the translation needed to be adapted in many passages, shifting from accuracy towards flow of language, hoping to have clarified the meaning of Luang Por’s teaching a little more.

Ajahn Kevali, Mai 2012
To let other people see the example of one’s actions, to live so they can see, is much better than to teach using merely words. Therefore let all of us follow in the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings together.
“Following in the Footsteps of the Enlightened Beings”
Following in the Footsteps of the Enlightened Beings

Excerpts from a short speech, which was written by Luang Por Liem, to be delivered at the opening of a monastic gathering in Australia in June 2006. This meeting brought together monastics from all traditions which have put down roots in Australia, including the Mahayana, Vajrayana and Theravada schools of Buddhism.

Siam, or Thailand, is renowned all over the world for being one of the countries where Buddhism is thriving. This is in part due to our leader His Majesty the King, giving Royal patronage to the national religion. As a result, Buddhism has flourished, especially in the areas of the study of theoretical knowledge and Dhamma education.

Our country has not yet been able to present to the world an acceptable example of somebody who has gained the highest spiritual fruits of Buddhism. Having emphasized the spreading of theoretical knowledge, we have yet to take the next step to spreading the practice of Dhamma. When we have succeeded in this, we will truly be following in the footsteps of the ariapuggalas, the Noble Enlightened Beings, who we have studied so much about. We have yet to send one of those who have received the full fruits of practice to prove to the world that the path of Buddhism is capable of extinguishing the suffering in the hearts of beings – just in the same way as modern science is able to relieve the physical pains of the body.
Day by day our lives come closer to ending. Therefore we must strive to follow in the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings, and incline towards the highest fruits of Buddhist practice. Thus we will fulfil our duty as monastics: the obligation to abandon all things that are obstacles to the ending of suffering. To cast them off completely. In contrast to this, is the lifestyle of settling down in huge residences – the way of a householder who needs to take care of all kinds of possessions, and has many worries and responsibilities.

Actually, being a householder or a monastic is not defined by the type of cloth that is worn, be it that of a layperson or a monastic. The way we lead our lives and the spiritual qualities we have define us. This is independent of the external form or of our special status as monastics. Anyone who lives without a house, who does not possess anything apart from the clothes he needs for covering his body, only has a single vessel for taking his meals, and is solely intent on a life free from suffering, can rightly be called an *anagarika*, a “Homeless One” – irrespective of whether he wears lay or monastic clothing. The principles of the Dhamma, which come from the heart, are not aimed at taking status or anything external as essential. We need to maintain the Dhamma in our hearts, develop an internal resource of refined thinking and have the dedication to act accordingly. This means to follow in the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings by way of our actions.

If we keep following in the footsteps of the Enlightened Beings, we will eventually discover a “science of the mind” – a spiritual knowledge that can be of great benefit to the world. We will be able to maintain this lifestyle with dignity in its original form, bring it to the West, and create something useful for the
world. In fact, the world has a tremendous thirst for truth and happiness. Are we going to lie down and wait for our habits to change by themselves, or are we going to try and do what can be done by human strength and effort, the way the Buddha has taught us to?

If studying Buddhism by the books was all we needed to do, leading the Holy Life of a Buddhist monastic wouldn’t be anything very profound. Nevertheless, to study the books with the motivation to find a way out of suffering seems worthwhile. But if our primary motivation to study is based on ambitions for gain and fame, we begin the Holy Life in the wrong way and are likely to go astray. So, can we see the danger in this? Isn’t it obvious, which path leads towards the world, and which one leads beyond? How can we hope to be able to pick up the fruits of the “noble science of spiritual qualities” if we only study the books?

Our teacher, the Lord Buddha, was born on the bare earth under a Sala-tree in Lumbini. He was enlightened sitting on the bare earth with just a thin cushion of grass, under the Bodhi-tree in Bodhgaya. He entered final nibbana lying down on the bare earth, under a Sala-tree, with merely his outer robe beneath him. Nothing more than that. His whole life the Buddha spent on the earth and under trees. This tells us how withdrawn the Buddha’s life was. He didn’t get involved with using extravagant dwellings. That he was able to realize the truth about the world of the mind is due to just this dwelling in seclusion. If we have never given it an honest try, to live in places of seclusion, we shouldn’t just assume that we lack the opportunity to cultivate the wonderful qualities that the Buddha taught about. We should cut off the fetters in our hearts that bind us to seeking company, entertainment and a life of
pleasure. We should maintain that it is an honour to frequent the kind of places of retreat that the Buddha himself used with great results and recommended to all of us. We should hold our being samanas of the Sakyan clan in honour, through our wholehearted determination to act with honesty towards ourselves and towards other people. Then we will reach the fruits of this noble science of the mind, an unchanging truth. Our hearts will be liberated, free from slavery to anything in this world. We will experience a power mightier than the sciences of the physical world – a power that is capable of bringing the world to lasting peace and coolness. Isn’t the constant lack, hunger and thirst of the world aroused by the temptations and stimulations that modern technology constantly keeps inventing anew? Modern science constantly causes people to suffer in all kinds of ways because it keeps stimulating the wish for more and more without knowing an end. Just like when somebody is actually full after having eaten, and along comes something that he likes even more to tempt him. Taking it, he experiences suffering burning him from inside. The wealthy and poor suffer all the same in this matter, until they eventually get a taste of this noble science, a taste of the way of life of the Enlightened Beings.

Why is it that people don’t take this wonderful medicine that can ward off the various diseases which arise in the mind? The suffering of the mind really is like a disease. Desire, never being satisfied, never knowing enough, is the virus which causes it. Peace and seclusion are the medicines which cure the illness. Those who lead their lives according to the practices of the Enlightened Beings are the ones who provide others with the medicine, helping them, after they have cured themselves.
So let us learn this noble science, the science of truth, and help each other for the highest benefit and happiness of the world, ourselves included. To do this, we need to live our lives in a truly fresh and soothing, cooling way, both externally and internally, bright and radiant; a symbol of coolness and tranquillity for others. We will be an example for those human beings who experience suffering weighing heavily on their hearts, whose eyes are dull and dark due to internal consumption by the fires of greed, anger and the frustration of their wishes. Merely representing the form of a Samana externally, but internally being full of thoughts of lust and craving just like laypeople, we won’t be capable of giving the world an example. We will be like the blind leading the blind.

We should create as much benefit for others as possible with our exemplary conduct, even though we won’t receive any reward for it. By the power of our kindness, other people will develop friendship towards one another as well. We should teach the world by sacrificing our own happiness, giving an example of how one can live well using only the bare necessities. We can collect what we have saved by refraining from luxury and use it for the benefit and happiness of other people that are still suffering.

All through history, in any day and age, a fully enlightened being, an arahant, would never spend his life in laziness or take advantage of other people by hiding away from society in order to search for his own happiness. In truth, the arahant merely waits for opportunities to give others an example of a truly happy person. All the time, all his life, the arahant is a model of patient endurance, resolute strength and diligent effort, even for people that aspire only to worldly success.
Take a look at the process of becoming an *arahant*. It starts with making the same resolution the Buddha himself made:

> “Bhikkhus, all of you should bring forth effort by determining in your minds: “Even if my blood and flesh all dries up and only bones and sinews remain, if I have not yet attained the fruits that are attainable by strength end exertion of energy by human beings, I won’t stop this effort of mine.”

This resolution shows that people should be taught to be able to bear with and endure things, firmly, relentlessly and continuously. Those who have attained to arahantship will always continue to put forth effort for the benefit of others. They continue to be an example and teach to patiently endure what nature brings, hot or cold weather for example. They aim at perfecting what is beneficial, performing only what is essential. For an *arahant* it is normal to be an example of somebody who is able to sustain his smile amidst all the flames of a fire which is spreading out and burning him relentlessly.

To let other people see the example of one’s actions, to live so they can see, is much better than to teach using merely words. Therefore, let all of us follow in the footsteps in of the Enlightened Beings together. True benefit, happiness and peace will then arise for all of us and for society as well, for our countries, and for the world.

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As a monk living the life of one who “sees the danger in the round of rebirth”, one is in a position where one has a duty to pass on the principles and practices of the Dhamma. It is necessary to take this obligation seriously.
“Practising One’s Duties”
Practising One’s Duties

Parts of a talk given on Jan 12th, 2007 in the ordination hall of Wat Nong Pah Pong, addressing the yearly monastic assembly commemorating Luang Por Chah’s passing away, where almost a thousand monks gather to express their faith towards their teacher and his specific way of training.

This ordination hall was built by Luang Por Chah in 1976. It was ready for use in 1977. One can say that it is quite a durable structure. It has served its purpose for over thirty years. An ordination hall is a religious site, a place that specifically belongs to the Sangha. The Sangha has permission to use this site from the sovereign of the nation for performing its religious tasks within Buddhism. A ceremonial site such as this is a fundamental feature of the Buddhist religion. It marks the physical presence of the religion, in the sense of material objects (sasanavatthu) being a testimony to, and representation of it. Religious objects of this kind are called senasana, the dwelling places of the Sangha. For this ordination hall we have received permission from the authorities governing society. We have ownership of it, and have the right to perform what benefits the Dhamma-Vinaya in whatever way we wish. This allows us to carry out the ceremony of ‘Going Forth’ and Bhikkhu ordination, the acceptance of new people into our community.

The ordination ceremony is meant to ensure that there are enough human resources for doing the work of passing on the heritage of the Buddhist religion. Whenever people ordain as monks the religion gains strength. The continuation of the religion
relies on nothing else but the human resources found within the community of monks.

As a member of the religion (sasanapuggala), the individual Buddhist plays a very important role. The religion depends on the people within it to turn its teachings, the sasanadhamma, into something that is of benefit. Taking up the obligation to transmit and pass on the teachings, the individual followers of a religion need to be possessed with certain spiritual qualities, for example the spiritual realizations of the Noble Enlightened Beings\(^1\). This doesn’t mean that the people that form the human resources of a religion already need to be perfect in their spiritual qualities to begin with, but it is necessary to gradually develop insights into them by means of following the principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya.

If a person’s spiritual values are not in line with the Dhamma-Vinaya, this will give rise to incorrect practices that conflict with the true values of the sangha. For this reason we need give those that practice doing the duties of upholding the Buddhist religion – the monks and novices – knowledge, advice and instruction. They will then acquire good standards, and practice what is correct, and in line with the principles of the Sangha. This is called “sikkha”, the Buddhist training-path.

*Sikkha* means to educate oneself through being aware of one’s conduct when performing the duties of a well-practiced person, namely, keeping sila and vinaya. We have to give sila and vinaya

\(^1\) i.e. the ariya-sangha, the Noble Disciples that have attained one of the stages of liberation. The ariya-sangha possesses nine qualities, for example: to practise well (*supatipanno*) or to practice directly (*ujupatipanno*).
great importance. One can say, they are the fundamental roots of our religion. When the monks possess the requisite education in terms of the vinaya, they will practice and conduct themselves in a way that gives rise to neither conflict, nor decline, nor degeneration.

As a monk living the life of one who “sees the danger in the round of rebirth”\(^2\), one is in a position where one has a duty to pass on the principles and practices of the Dhamma. It is necessary to take this obligation seriously.

To train and educate oneself is actually not very difficult, because the core teachings of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the vinaya, relate directly to our own behaviour and actions in all their variety. Whatever behaviour is inappropriate or not right, the Buddha prohibits, teaching us, so we know how to refrain from it and give it up. In our interactions with other people, we need to be aware of the fact that our actions will have an effect on them. This is something to keep in mind very clearly.

As one of the individual monks living in a certain place, doing his duties as part of the human potential of Buddhism, one shouldn’t give way to thinking narrow-mindedly in terms of “atta”, one’s own person. One should think in terms of the communal aspects of this religion, considering the results and effects that occur on the communal level. Anything that is not correct may cause division and arguments in unskilful and unbeautiful ways.

\(^2\) this is a popular rendering of “bhikkhu”, the word for monk in Pali
There is nothing that can destroy us other than negligence. Negligence comes from not searching and inquiring to find the knowledge of how to improve things so that they become beneficial. This is what we need to try, and, being a part of the religion’s human potential each individual plays a role in maintaining it, both on the material and the human side of the religion.

Now, being in a position to do things and to take on responsibilities, we should be aware of the importance of having such an opportunity. We have the opportunity, so we try to protect it – for our own sake. We need to make the most of our opportunities. As concerns the support of the laypeople: they are ready. Even if they aren’t able to give material support, they will still encourage us mentally. In any case they will give their appreciation. So we try to do our duty. Don’t be somebody who is weak.

So I’d like to express my appreciation for all of you living in different places doing your duty in line with the teachings of our venerated teachers and the Dhamma-Vinaya. Don’t do the things you do merely following your wishes. This isn’t good. One should seek the counsel of others. We have many friends in the Dhamma living together with us. At least, we shouldn’t do things in a rush. Rather act in reasonable way. Then things won’t go to ruin and we will be pleased with what we have done. What we have done will be in line with the Dhamma and the vinaya. Our monasteries, once they are built up completely, will be conducive for practice, and we won’t have problems, or be frustrated or burdened with too many worries. Everything will feel cool and tranquil, and we’ll be in a position where we are accepted by society.
So all of you that are to fulfil these duties, be well motivated to do so, even if you are living alone – then there shouldn’t be many problems, nothing to spoil. Please always do your duties according to our fundamental, essential principles. Always keep to the ideals, and have personal standards of practice for the way you lead your lives. These standards will serve as our reinforcements, bolstering us and warding off problems. They will be a refuge for us to rely on. If we take such standards of practice as our basic principles, our actions will give us strength and a feeling of being at ease.

What I have just spoken about are things which are not too profound, but are the underlying principles that I have practiced with in this monastery. Having come together to this meeting here, you probably realize that this monastery is a place that we should protect and keep functioning in every aspect: the material objects, the human resources, and even all the different religious ceremonies within the monastery. Let us keep them in line with the fundamental principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya, within the Buddhist religion.

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“Ordination: Going Forth”
Being a true human being means being somebody who possesses a mind that goes beyond the nature of the world.
Going Forth is the translation of the Pali term pabbajja that is used for the samanera (novice) ordination. It means to go forth from the household life to the life of a samana, a contemplative. This teaching was given by Luang Por Liem during a ceremony of Going Forth of Western monks at Wat Nong Pah Pong on Feb. 19th, 2003.

So far in this ordination-ceremony, you have prepared these sets of yellow robes, sewn and dyed them according to the most excellent allowances of the Buddha, and uttered the words requesting the Going Forth. This is already something very wholesome.

The next step, the Going Forth, requires that you plant and cultivate faith and inspiration within the field of the Triple Gem. The Buddha, the founder of this religion, has allowed the Going Forth only if one initially studies and knows what the qualities of the Lord Buddha actually are.

The Buddha’s virtues\(^3\) are as follows:

He possesses wisdom, sharpness of mind and discernment, applying it to those things that ought to be known and seen, knowing their advantages and disadvantages and whether they are

\(^3\) the three classical virtues of the Buddha (*buddhaguna*): *pañña* (wisdom), *visuddhi*, (purity), *karuna* (compassion).
beneficial or not, all the way to each of the Four Noble Truths – and he has done so without anyone teaching him. This aspect points to of the Buddha’s *Quality of Wisdom*.

The Buddha has left behind all unwholesome states of mind, the defilements and desires, the habits and modes of being that have been incited by these defilements over a vast stretch of time. He possesses the most excellent traits of character, and is composed of qualities of Dhamma that are essential. This aspect is the Buddha’s *Quality of Purity*.

The Buddha is endowed with loving kindness and compassion for the crowd of beings heated up by the fires of defilement and dukkha. He advises and teaches so that these beings, having listened, may follow and practice after him – for the complete extinguishing of the fires of dukkha – and he does so regardless of the troubles, hardships and difficulties arising for him. This aspect is the Buddha’s *Quality of Great Compassion*.

The noble being that dwells in these three qualities is called “Buddha” – the one who knows well and perfectly. When, knowing well and perfectly in this way, a Buddha points out and teaches. These doctrines and teachings are called the “Dhamma”. Further, those people that have heard the Dhamma and behave and practice accordingly – following its disciplinary code, the vinaya – are called the “Sangha”.

The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, are the three objects that we are giving the highest importance to. When we feel that we truly respect the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, it is appropriate to receive the Going Forth.
Now I will tell you the basic meditation objects, as a means for you to train for liberation from the defilements. They are given in Pali, just in the same way as the teachers of old have been passing them down for many generations. Please repeat after me:

“Kesa, loma, nakha, danta, taco, taco, danta, nakha, loma, kesa.”

These meditation objects the Buddha called the root-meditation objects. They provide a way for our mind to experience the fading away of the cravings and desires that stain our minds.

It is normal that the ordinary unenlightened being understands the experience of desires in a personal way. The Buddha wanted us to see desires as non-self, as non-personal, and to realize that there is no “being” there, just the existence of elements – material form that behaves according to the laws of nature and relies on its environment being in balance. Then things can come into being. Yet this doesn’t mean that they are stable. They exist in such a way that there is change and alteration all the time. They are not in a condition that permanently stays the same. There needs to be arising, existing and ceasing. This way of being is what we call existence according to the laws of nature.

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4 meaning: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin; the five visible external components of the body that the Buddha taught to reflect on.

5 “the desires that stain our minds” is a common idiom in Thai Dhamma talks. It captures the understanding that desires are defilements. The literal translation is: the desires that dye (or colour) our mind.
Investigating these root meditation objects leads us to seeing instability, non-sustainability and non-self, a way of being that is arises, exists and ceases. This weakens our desires, our grasping onto and giving importance to the self.

When the assumption of a self has weakened, our mental reactions that come from having to interact with other people in the world will also be weakened – regardless of the kind of situation that we are in. If it is one where we are accepted and receive praise, we won’t feel happy about it, and if it is a situation where we are blamed, we won’t feel hurt. Not having feelings of either liking or disliking will allow us to understand ourselves better. Liking and disliking are what is called “Worldly Dhammas”\(^6\), the qualities that rule over those people who still have dust in their eyes – the average unenlightened beings that are still immature. Worldly people will see these mind states as something worth wishing for, but, as we are practitioners who aspire to lessen the desires staining our minds, we reflect on seeing such states of mind as merely an experience of feelings that arise, stay for a while and then cease – both pleasant and unpleasant feelings (\textit{sukhavedana} and \textit{dukkhavedana}). The Buddha called happiness \textit{somanassa}, which is considered a mode of \textit{sukhavedana}, and sadness \textit{domanassa}, which is a mode of \textit{dukkhavedana}. Dukkha and sukha are expressions of reality that cause emotions to arise. The Buddha taught us to focus our minds on them and know any feeling as being simply a feeling. The emotions of liking or disliking we know as simply feelings. There

\(^6\) in Pali: \textit{lokadhamma}, the eight Worldly Dhammas are: praise and blame, fame and disrepute, gain and loss, happiness and suffering. Often these are simply expressed as two aspects: wished-for and unwished-for phenomena (\textit{ittharamana} and \textit{anittharamana}).
is nothing that could be firmly established and enduring, lasting or permanent. All these are just states of mind that, after having arisen, will naturally have to cease.

By understanding our experiences like this, we won’t get lost thinking, “this is good” or “this is bad”. These kinds of thoughts are just attributes of delusion and wrong view – nothing else, so the Buddha taught us to focus and reflect on seeing them as phenomena of the mind\textsuperscript{7} – being born, existing and passing away. There is no need for one to be a slave of these processes, a slave of the world, or a slave of the defilements of pleasant and unpleasant feelings. One should see that these processes always imply a feeling that something is lacking. They are of the kind that one can say is never full, that doesn’t know the point when there’s enough – just like a flame can never get enough fuel.

Focusing on these processes as simply arising, existing and passing away, we are able to turn ourselves away from them. We can get out of the situation not becoming slaves of desires or \textit{tanha}, craving. Generally, \textit{tanha} is a feeling that is coupled with \textit{dukkha}, a feeling that is difficult to bear with, a feeling of non-freedom. We need to investigate these feelings, and this will bring us to experience peace of mind – peace from pleasant and unpleasant feeling. We can live like \textit{samanas} then, like “peaceful ones”.

Let us take these meditation objects and develop them, apply them and bring them to life, so that we know this world. Knowing the world, we know this reality, and what our human birth is

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{namadhamma}: mental phenomena, as opposed to \textit{rupadhamma}, the phenomena of the physical world (literally: form).
about. Being a true human being means being somebody who possesses a mind that goes beyond the nature of the world. Let us take this as our attitude in meditation, helping ourselves work towards freedom from the power of delusion, wrong view and unwholesome mind states, so that we can attain a state of mind that is pure and clean, see the usefulness of our being born as a human being and the practice of Dhamma, and experience how beneficial it is to relate to ourselves in the correct and appropriate way.

Now I will hand the yellow robes to you, for you to go and put on. Then you can come in again and take the precepts, so that the ceremony of Going Forth will be complete.

“…Come here…!” (Luang Por says in English)

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After the postulants have put on the yellow robes and taken the ten precepts of a novice, the talk continues:

From now on, being novices, it is your duty to correct and develop yourselves. You need to constantly recollect that now you belong to a different group than the householders and the common people in the world. Here, we are leading our lives in order to see the danger and disadvantages of *samsara*\(^8\), the round of death and

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\(^8\) *samsara* (Pali): the (endless) round of birth and death.
rebirth. It is our obligation to make the qualities of a samana arise in us – being somebody whose ways of life are peaceful.

We develop peaceful bodily conduct. Our body – each and every part of it – should not be used in the manner of a fool. Our conduct needs to be that of a wise man. That means to have humility, an attitude of respect, and live in a subordinate way, not getting carried away with our sense of self – one can say, guarding ones body. Likewise, our speech also needs to be guarded, as it can be the source of all kinds of good and bad things. We need to know how to use speech in a good way. If our speech is grounded in humility, it won't get us into trouble. In our practice we need to keep observing ourselves for the sake of protection – in every form, both in our bodily and verbal conduct – applying mindfulness and keeping ourselves within the standards of the monastic training. In this way we won't get into confusion or low and vulgar mind states. Low-mindedness is a trait of worldly beings that are capable of doing all kinds of bad things or behave in degenerate ways. They are following the ways of the unwholesome: anger, desire, and delusion.

Our becoming samanas should gradually give rise to changes in a good direction. Having taken up the training we will have to practice the lifestyle of one who sees how life can be beneficial. We will have to give great attention to ourselves, developing the qualities of honesty and straight-forwardness in our minds. We should maintain good ethical conduct, and possess a sense of shame towards doing bad (hiri). When one possesses a sense of shame towards bad actions, one will also show fear (ottappa) and be cautious, because one sees that bad deeds won’t lead to freedom.
These are some things to keep in mind when we start training ourselves. We follow the intention to keep sila and develop purity of heart. Sila in fact means purity. It is the intention of loving kindness and friendliness (*metta*), or the intention to respect the rights of other people, being considerate in whatever one does. We should start relating to our environment in a way that examines and investigates it, for the sake of seeking *saccadhamma*, the truth of reality. These are some things that you need to develop an understanding of and educate yourselves in.

Another aspect is how we use our faculties for communicating and relating to the world. We have got eyes, ears, a nose, a tongue, a sense of touch and a mind. Having eyes, we need to know how to guard them. These eyes we have can give rise to both good and evil. The same is true for the ears, etc. If there is both good and evil, we need the skills to differentiate, and choose what is good. For example, if the eye sees something that causes feelings of getting carried away by emotions or sensual desire, we need to know how to control ourselves. If this happens, we need to use meditation techniques such as investigating the body. Or we contemplate our feelings in relation to the two faces of the Worldly Dhammas: those wished-for and unwished-for phenomena. We see them as things that simply arise and cease. They are merely temporary states of existence, and the qualities of stability and durability can not be found in them. This is why the Buddha warns us to be cautious and restrained whenever the eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour, the body senses something touching it, or there are thoughts arising in the mind. He advises us to have mindfulness and not be careless, not allowing experiences to come up that we didn't filter wisely. This is another aspect in which you
will have to train in as samanas: you constantly need to be filtering.

In our training there is the topic of how to relate to the requisites of a monk (robes, food, dwelling, and medicines) and the necessities of life. Following the example of the Enlightened Beings, we live as somebody who is content and has few wishes. We walk the safe path of those who dwell in states of mind that are beyond the world. The way to practice with regards to our requisites is by knowing what is enough. If we get a little, that's enough. If we get a lot, that's enough. Even if we don't get anything at all, that's enough. We train to become somebody who always has enough. That means, somebody who is happy with whatever comes. In this way, our monastic life will be free from worries about these things. We have all the opportunity to continue with our studies without obstructions, educating and observing ourselves further, supported simply by peace and seclusion. We rely on all the opportunities given to us in this lifestyle. We really don't have to bother about anything else. Even concerning the world and society: we don't have to worry. We aren't living in conflict with anybody. We are living for the sake of creating benefits for ourselves and others. When we are not in conflict with others, qualities arise in us that others find acceptable. This is our task.

You will always need to put forth effort in this practice. It is the quality of diligence that will enable us to experience perfection in ourselves. Perfection means to be completely mature, ready and prepared⁹. Complete preparedness means that

⁹ in Thai: prom, a word colloquially meaning “ready” or together and used by Luang Por often in the sense of attainment, perfection, fulfilment etc., but it
there are no longer any problems. This is the case with somebody whose mind is fully enlightened and awake, somebody who has already passed their "shining night of prosperity" where there is no more darkness, and there are no more feelings of being oppressed and irritated. A state of being at ease permeates one's mind, and in one's heart one feels fresh and cool.

We need to apply ourselves diligently to our tasks. This is called practice. We strive to make the most of our lives. Our lives are really very short and a chance like this is truly rare. We don't have all that much time. The Buddha compared us to dewdrops being dried out by the sun, or to cattle being led to the slaughter. It is really like this. Time keeps passing, but it doesn't just merely pass. The facts that our bodily form keeps deteriorating makes itself known with every passing moment. It is possible that the hair on top of our head starts falling out, or our teeth that had once been strong, start to become loose. Our eyesight that used to be clear and bright may become feeble, and our ears that once had been able to hear well and clearly may not even be able to locate where the sounds are coming from any more. Sometimes a noise comes from the north, but we turn our head to the south. We start to make more and more mistakes. As life passes, our behaviour undergoes changes, so we need to understand these processes of life. We have to be aware that time passes and see the value of inclining ourselves towards pure and peaceful states of mind, unconfused, and with a heart at ease. Living without confusion is all we need for being at ease. We can't be well when there is

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also carries the connotations of maturity, being ripe, or being fully prepared. 

10 an expression from the Thai translation of the Bhaddekaratta Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya Nr 139) that is frequently chanted in Wat Nong Pah Pong, here referring to the night of enlightenment.
chaos. When the powers of defilements and desires are burning us, we become heated up and can't find peace. We are taken by force to become slaves of our desires. We think that this thing is good or that thing is better or the best and will bring us some happiness. There is no end in sight. The Buddha taught us to see the danger in thinking this way. Don't get bound up with taking desires as something positive. They are poison. If we swallow such a substance, it will harm us and we won't feel well. We'll be in deep trouble and get all frantic, being burned alive by dukkha. Following our desires will bring about our downfall instead of giving us the chance to experience the supreme. We sink into an inferior position, into disastrous situations. This is the opposite of the path of progress in our development. It isn't good.

Now that you have the opportunity, bring up the motivation for training. Continually. Walk on the path that the Buddha pointed out. This path is what is meant by right practice. Within the Buddha's path lies full perfection: the training in sila, the training of the mind and the training of wisdom. Don't lead your life like they do out in the world. Their lives keep following the stream of delusion. If pleasant feelings arise, they are happy about it. If unpleasant feelings arise, they become sad. They eagerly pursue the pleasant feelings and hate the unpleasant ones and try to do away with them. This seems unworthy. Just think about it. We human beings shouldn't get lost in our delusions to such an extent. We should know better. Then things will be to our advantage.

So, be determined and motivated – all of you – to take up these duties in the name of being a samana. Do this, as if your
monastic life was a *chedi*\(^{11}\), a place of reverence and devotion that is worthy of worship and respect. Keep on fulfilling your duties in this way. Taking this opportunity to fulfil our obligations, we become an example and a guide for others, somebody who brings benefit and qualities useful for future times. So let all of us be motivated and determined in our hearts and minds. May every one of us fulfil these duties of a samana in a complete and perfect way.

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\(^{11}\) a circular monument of veneration, also called a *stupa* in Pali.
“Ordination: The Announcements”
Living at the root of a tree we won’t develop the tendency to hold on to things, such as thoughts of something being ours or belonging to us.
Ordination:

The Announcements

After the Going Forth – sometimes in the same ceremony – Bhikkhu ordination (upasampada) is given. In the ceremony of upasampada, a certain canonical teaching called anusasana (announcements) needs to be recited. The teacher announces the nissaya, the minimum four requisites upon which a Bhikkhu’s life is dependent (almsfood, robes made from cloth wrapping up corpses, the dwelling at the foot of a tree and fermented urine as medicine), and the akaraniyakicca, the four things never to be done by a Bhikkhu (sexual intercourse, stealing, killing a human being and falsely claiming superhuman qualities). The anusasana must be recited in Pali. In the ordination ceremony on Dec. 15th, 2005 Luang Por gave the following brief summary of the anusasana in his own words.

The procedure of ordination into monkhood becomes complete by the chanting of a formal act of the Sangha, which we have just finished. So, now you are Bhikkhus in this Dhamma-Vinaya.

In the lifestyle of a monk it is necessary to have rules for proper conduct and practice. We consider it our duty to follow these guidelines, and we have to fulfil this duty correctly, making sure that our conduct and practice is in line with the principles handed down to us by the Buddha. This requires that we do some study and develop understanding.
What the Buddha called “the announcements” state the points of conduct that are the duties of a monk. The announcements can be divided into two parts:

The first one is what the Buddha called the *nissaya* (the things to depend on), and the second one is what the Buddha called the *akaraniyakicca* (the things that shouldn’t be done). The *nissayas* point out a way of leading one’s life that is simple and easy. There are four *nissayas*:

For sustaining our lives as a member of the Sangha, we rely on wandering for almsfood in villages. It is up to others how much they support us. We do our duty of going on almsround in a manner in which we don’t demand or ask for anything. This is in accordance with the tasks and duties of a samana, somebody who inclines towards peace. This is what the Buddha mentioned about “the dependence of going on almsround”.

Then there is the “dependence on wearing *pamsukula* cloth”\(^\text{12}\). This is meant to give rise to a feeling of dispassion in us, since *pamsukula* cloth is used to wrap up something loathsome and disgusting like a corpse. Our body is in many ways loathsome and disgusting and shows signs that are not desirable. If what we use to cover our body gets in touch with such a dirty thing, it becomes just as disgusting as the body itself. This is “the dependence of *pamsukula* cloth”.

For our dwelling place, the Buddha wanted us to resort to tranquil and secluded locations. That means to live in a situation

\(^{12}\) discarded cloth, rags, or specifically cloth that is taken from a corpse before the cremation.
where we naturally have to rely on a simple and uncomplicated lifestyle. The Buddha said to live at the root of a tree. Living at the root of a tree – a place where there is silence and seclusion – we won’t develop *upadana*, the tendency to hold on to things, such as thoughts of something being ours or belonging to us, and similar attitudes. It is for the reduction of mind states of attachment to our desires that we do the practice of living at the foot of a tree.

The fourth dependence concerns the practice towards one’s health. When our body is in an abnormal condition – for example when it can’t adapt to changes of weather – we may use something that everybody possesses without exception: urine, which we drink after fermenting it, following the Buddha’s advice. The Buddha called it “to adjust one’s elements”, meaning to bring our body back to having sufficient resistance when external conditions change.

That was the part dealing with the four nissayas, things that we are supposed to do. The other part of the announcements is about actions that we should never do. These are:

– sexual activities (namely, sexual intercourse),

– taking objects that weren’t given to us by others (or that others don’t consent to us taking),

– practices that lack metta, friendliness and helpfulness (that is explicitly: not to kill, destroy or create conflicts and the like).
The fourth point is: The Buddha didn’t allow us to falsely claim and boast about superhuman qualities in ourselves, out of self-importance or delusion. When we take on the status of a monk we shouldn’t misconceive ourselves to be better than anybody else. All of us are in the same situation, determined by the laws of nature that we all have to experience. There is no exception. To see ourselves like this is for the sake of reducing feelings of self-importance that may arise.

So these four factors are called the akaraniyakicca, the actions that shouldn’t be done. I will now announce them to you in their original language, the language that we use in preservation of the original teachings, so that we will be able to apply and use them as points of practice, fulfilling the tasks and duties of a samana.

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“Contentment”
To ordain is not a matter of external things.
During his visit to Malaysia in May 2005 Luang Por Liem was asked the following questions about monastic life:

**Question:** We’d like to know about your experiences living together with Luang Por Chah.

**Answer:** Generally, Luang Por Chah taught us to conduct ourselves practicing contentment and having few wishes. Contentment and fewness of wishes, these words describe a lifestyle where one doesn’t have much to worry about. It is also the lifestyle of the “ariyavamsa”\(^{13}\), to live without ties and fetters. Contentment and fewness of wishes is a factor of perfection. It is one of the qualities of Dhamma that the Enlightened Ones possess. Now, if one isn’t yet enlightened but just an ordinary person, one still trains according to the guidelines of behaviour of the Enlightened Ones. One takes their ways of practicing and makes them into one’s own habits. For example: the Enlightened Ones teach us not to become angry, so even though we want to follow our anger, we make a point of refraining from it. Doing so for long periods of time, becoming angry ceases to be one of our habits, and eventually we don’t want to become angry any more. This is an example of how we practice so that certain ways of acting become natural. I see this as a way of life that is free from conflict with anyone and free from dangers. This is the way I have practiced with Luang Por Chah.

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\(^{13}\) *ariyavamsa* (Pali): noble lineage – the lineage of enlightened beings; specifically defined by the Buddha as those who possess the qualities of contentment and fewness of wishes.
Question: Luang Por, this layperson is planning to ordain and would like to ask for some personal advice about leaving behind the household-life and becoming an anagarika – a homeless one, one who has Gone Forth. Do you have some recommendations?

Answer: To set out and ordain means to go against the stream. Going against the stream one needs patience and endurance. One needs to build up patience and endurance to the utmost. This means to the level where one gets used to it and becomes proficient in it. Just like fish go against the stream. Any fish that has life will go against the stream all the time. Only the dead fish float along with the current. We need to be like the living fish in our training, building up patience and endurance, making these qualities our habit and getting used to restraining ourselves. Because actually, this life isn’t about much. It always has its good and bad sides. This is something all of us have the capability to understand.

Renunciation means renouncing what we seek for and wish to have in the world. People in the world are like flies that go for filthy and dirty things. If we start realizing this, there is nothing difficult about ordaining. It makes things easier if we feel that we don’t want to get involved with things much more. Then one doesn’t actually have to bear with and endure much at all, it all depends on one’s disposition.

But, as we all know, it is true that this practice goes against one’s biological instincts. Usually, the instincts of human beings are designed to have us form partnerships. Sexual feelings are definitely present. As all those feelings around love and hate are still present we need to know how to apply patient endurance and effort.
Don’t go and follow the thoughts of wanting to have it easy and be comfortable. You need to keep in mind that the source of peace and the attainment of perfection is to be found exactly where dukkha is. It comes from dukkha. That we can experience comfort stems from nothing else than dukkha. So, actually, dukkha is part of what enables human beings to experience the sense of perfection – by having mindfulness and wisdom.

External dukkha is something that all of us are able to observe with one another. However, in order to recognize internal dukkha, the dukkha that concerns one’s state of mind, one needs to know for oneself. Ordaining is not a matter of external things. I myself have passed through some of these experiences and know them well, having ordained when I was still in my youth, in the period of life in which one likes to lose oneself in fun and pleasure, easily forgetting oneself. But I upheld that being a young man, one has to study and learn from these experiences, even though they may be painful, hard and difficult. One needs to understand them as a part of life.

Problems are part of life and are meant to be learned from, so I undertook this, resisting and going against the stream, not taking much pleasure in things that are pleasurable and comfortable.

Also, in our livelihood, one should live like somebody who doesn’t possess much. Even with robes, we only have a single set, just that. When I’m in Thailand I have just this set of robes. Coming here to Malaysia, I have just this set of robes. We don’t have many possessions like householders or worldly people do. We have just this, and one can say that just this is enough to alleviate suffering. It is enough to ward off sun, wind, cold or
heat. We maintain these possessions merely for living our lives. In the end everything deteriorates and disintegrates anyway, so why would you have strong feelings about possessing things? This attitude creates a sense of being satisfied and pleased in one’s heart.

When one is satisfied in every respect, things fall into place. Feeling satisfied, we are happy and at ease wherever we are, simply that. We are happy whether we live by ourselves or in a group, whether we have little or much. When we have eaten enough of our meal – should someone come to fill up our bowl again, we simply don’t want it.

Eventually we develop into somebody who doesn’t have any obstructions, doesn’t have any worries about anything any more, living in a way that can be called “sugato”\(^{14}\).

This is an outline of how things gradually evolve.

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\(^{14}\) literally: “well-gone” – an epithet of the Buddha.
“Restraint”
When relating to the things that are necessary for our daily living, we follow the example of the Samana, who leads a life of restraint and composure.
Restraint

Luang Por Liem gave the following advice when replying to questions of the monks and novices at Buddha-Bodhivana Monastery, Melbourne, in May 2006.

To practice Dhamma means protection. It makes one strong and creates solidity and stability. This depends on conducting oneself with restraint, as it is mentioned in a principle we are using, called patimokkhasamvara, to practice restraint within the training rules of a monk (patimokkha).

We can also look closer at the akaraniyakicca, the things never to be done by a monk, that are about actions in which our conduct needs to be different from that of the people in the world, householders, or average unenlightened beings who are dominated by the powers of desire, sensuality and lustful feelings.

It is in the first one of the “things never to be done”, that the Buddha spoke about interactions with the opposite sex, namely forbidding sexual intercourse. This goes against the grain. It really feels like this goes against our nature, but we resist following it in order to change our habits of acting like people in the world. We don’t give sexual activities much importance, as they are all about dirty things. One can say that they bring us into situations where we lose our freedom. Seeing it this way maybe helps us understand this point better.

What is called “restraint” is all about changing one’s habits, coming out of darkness and seeking the light – or the bright and
the pure, as one might call it. Maybe we don’t yet see and understand what this brightness and purity is actually like. We don’t know yet. This is merely because we are still in a state where such experiences are unfamiliar to us.

In this situation, we have to pay special attention to the way we relate to and communicate with the opposite sex, as we will always have to interact in some way. The Buddha gave some definite guidelines of practice here, directed to Venerable Ananda. In fact, at first, the Buddha spoke in terms of completely denying the contact. When Venerable Ananda asked him, “How should I practice towards members of the opposite sex?” the Buddha said, “It is best not to look at them at all.” So the Buddha is in a way against us getting to know and see the opposite sex at all. This is because the Buddha doesn’t want us to face situations which we can’t resist, where things might go off and we crumble. Then Venerable Ananda asked the Buddha further, “It is sometimes necessary to look at women. How should we practice then?” What the Buddha then said helps us to keep a responsible attitude in the various stages that we might get emotionally involved. He said, “If you need to look at them, don’t speak to them.” This was the Buddha’s advice, but Venerable Ananda, who was in the position of teaching the Dhamma-Vinaya to the nuns, was still doubtful and asked further: “What about situations where one has to speak, for example, when they need directions. How shall one practice then?” The Buddha further commented, “If you have to speak, you need to have mindfulness while speaking.”

So, let us think about this: “When you speak, be mindful…” How is one mindful? This is something we need to discuss further. One is mindful in a way that goes against the stream of
our emotions. Just like the fish that have the skill to resist the current. They never give way to the stream or stop going against it. Even when they sleep they go against it. Their whole life they are in the stream, but they withstand it. That’s what the Buddha meant by being mindful when we meet the opposite sex. Of course, this is also a matter of training. The Buddha called this restraint and composure.

When relating to the things that are necessary for our daily living, we follow the example of the samana, who leads a life of restraint and composure. A samana needs to be restrained, composed and cautious. This is similar to the way we need to counter distractions when we are developing *samadhi*\(^\text{15}\), creating a container of stability and firmness of mind. The Buddha describes this as part of the “four right efforts”\(^\text{16}\). Although this is one of the principles from theory, there are parts in it that we can apply in our practice and conduct. The Buddha speaks of putting effort into being careful not to let bad things arise out of one’s inner tendencies. We all know all-too-well what bad things are. We just need to look closely and ask ourselves what lies in us that is bound to take us to situations where we drift off on paths that feel insecure and low.

This is one of the principles that leads to the realization of the Dhamma. We should try to cultivate a sense of restraint and caution when using our sense faculties. But not to the level of being sceptical of everything. If we practice restraint so much that

\(^{15}\) *samadhi* oftentimes means meditation in general, although it is the specific type of meditation that aims at one-pointed concentration of mind.

\(^{16}\) *samma-paṭṭhāna*, the first of which is *samvarā-paṭṭhāna*, the effort to prevent unwholesome dhāmas that haven’t yet arisen from arising.
we aren’t able to trust any more, that’s not right either. Restraint should be practiced in the way of a samana. If it only leads to scepticism and insecurity, it has gone beyond what is appropriate and beautiful.

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“Gentleness, Humbleness and Patience”
Anyone who behaves gently and humbly will always be well respected.
Gentleness, Humbleness and Patience

Advice given to monks from Wat Pah Nanachat asking for dependence on Luang Por at the beginning of their stay at Wat Nong Pah Pong on Jan 28th, 2006.

You need to train to bring forth an attitude of gentleness and humbleness. The words “gentle” and “humble” describe what is good conduct for Sangha members – something that we need to practice by ourselves and develop in ourselves. With these qualities, the Sangha is well accepted by society. Anyone who behaves gently and humbly will always be well respected, even by the devas\textsuperscript{17}. The devas praise a gentle and humble demeanour. Whatever it is, our prostrations, or the way we raise our hands to greet\textsuperscript{18}, all these are expressions of good manners that all of us in our Sangha should practice.

This practice and training is like the ornament of a samana. It makes him beautiful and enriches him. Whenever a samana interacts within a society, he will never provoke feelings of aversion, irrespective of the social status of the people he meets. A samana is well accepted by society. It is worth noticing that those leaders of society who take the “Ten Dhamma Qualities for a Ruler”\textsuperscript{19} seriously also need to develop the quality of gentleness

\begin{itemize}
\item deva (Pali): heavenly beings, angels, gods.
\item a\textit{ñ}jali in Pali or wai in Thai.
\item the ten Raja-Dhamma (Jataka 378): dana (generosity), sila (virtue), paricca\textit{ga} (selfless work and sacrifice), a\textit{j}ava (honest work), maddava (deporting oneself with gentleness and congeniality), t\textit{apa} (austerity), a\textit{k}kodha
\end{itemize}
and humbleness. The same was true for the Buddha himself. He gave importance to these qualities because they bring up beauty in oneself and cause others to appreciate one. We should understand that gentleness and humbleness are very important qualities for a samana. The expression “adikalyanam” (beautiful in the beginning) points to this: one becomes beautiful to look at right from the start. So we should train in being gentle and humble. It is normal that raw materials need to undergo a process of change and alteration until the outcome is a useful product that pleases people. With no changes and corrections the result would be unsatisfactory. Similarly, if human beings don’t undergo training, exercise or practice, they are like raw materials. Other people won’t appreciate them.

As samanas we need to train to calm down and weaken our worldly behaviour. For example, it is the style of laypeople to sit on chairs or around a table. Merely to change this habit to sitting “pappiab” on the floor is already quite difficult for us. It isn’t impossible, though. After a bit of training one can sit on the floor with ease. When I was a layman, I myself had never sat pappiab or in the meditation posture before. So I was quite stiff and reluctant with these postures and with all the ways of paying respect or bowing. It didn’t go smoothly. These things were irritating for me, too. But if one relies on a sense of patient endurance and keeps on doing these practices over and over, then

(freedom from anger), avihimsa (non-violence), khanti (patient endurance) and avirodhana (not straying from righteousness).

20 pappiab (Thai): a semi-cross-legged sitting posture on the floor with one foot pointing behind to the back. This is the posture that is considered most appropriate and polite for monks to assume when not meditating, especially when listening to the Dhamma.
one becomes used to them. One’s way of bowing and being respectful starts to feel smoother and smoother, and the sitting posture doesn’t make it feel like you are straining the leash any more. One can do these things if one keeps exercising oneself.

The training of all these external aspects is necessary. One needs to rely on the continuity of one’s efforts. In the end one is able to do things. The reason for such practices is because, in keeping to our intentions as monks, we want to take on a life of simplicity. To sit on the floor, for example, is plain and simple, because there is no need to arrange the place with objects to sit on or cushions to support one, just like in those places that the Buddha considered to be simple dwellings\textsuperscript{21}. The Buddha wanted us to live in a way where we develop an attitude that is orientated towards nature. This is an important aspect.

We need to train and develop in our practice. Any aspect of the practice relies on training, on doing things over and over. There are certain qualities in the life of an anagarika, one who isn’t bound to a home, that the Buddha called treasures. They are valuable goods. You probably know some of them. One of them has to do with our body – it is what the Buddha called kayasamvara, restraint of the body. It concerns our bodily behaviour. Possessing restraint towards the body helps us to see things clearly, because our attention needs to be connected to our bodily movements, activities and the respective feelings in each posture. We need to directly know these things in time, and – for the sake of restraint – we also need to be able to tell right away whether each bodily action or movement is appropriate for an

\footnote{\textsuperscript{21} e.g. living at the root of a tree, out in the open, or in empty houses, as mentioned in the thirteen ascetic practices allowed by the Buddha.}
anagarika, someone who practices in order to realize the danger of samsara.

We practice to observe our bodily conduct according to the good manners and etiquette of a samana. To practice like this gives rise to beauty. Maintaining one’s bodily conduct is similar to looking after one’s requisites, like the dwelling, for example. One needs to maintain it well, so it can be of use and provide comfort. In our training, we also need to check whether what we do is appropriate for our community or not. What do our friends in the monastic life think? Would they approve of our behaviour? If not, we need to practice further. These are external things, of course, but still, we should see them as important factors that define our lives as anagarikas, those who realize the dangers and drawbacks of samsara. You need to be alert and aware of yourselves and keep good etiquette – or, in other words, keep sila.

Sila can also be called “an awareness of the dangers and drawbacks in one’s actions” and the intention, or feeling, that one no longer wants to act in ways that are not good. Armed with such intentions – a sense of concern regarding actions that cause enmity and danger – we need to develop and improve our capacity to resist. Bodily resistance depends on factors like food, the weather and our environment. Being a monk, food is something that we aren’t able to control or choose by ourselves, as we depend on laypeople’s free will to sacrifice by practicing dana (generosity). We need to realize that what we get is independent from what we would like to have. Actually, the things that we want are very much conditioned by the things we are used to. Being monks, we need to understand that our practice has to
follow the principle of being happy with whatever we receive or have. An attitude like this will make us feel normal about things.

As lay people we always did what we were used to. We usually call anything “good” if it was what we liked. Anything we disliked was “bad”. We’ve been supporting such an attitude over a long, long time. Now we need to go against it. We have to train ourselves in going against what we are used to and what we like. An example of this is sitting in the meditation posture. If we have never sat in this position before, the first time we do it, there are a lot of painful feelings. What one experiences are feelings of agitation and irritation, to put it simply: dukkha. This is the same whenever we don’t get what we like or what we were used to. Sometimes we struggle so much that we become worried and start to doubt everything. This is where we need to learn how to let things go, how to put things down. We need to realize that, as monks, we are not part of those people that can arrange things according to our wishes or ask for things. Which kind of food we get, for example, is up to the donor. So we need to be able to adapt and step back from our own ideas. Not getting what one wishes, one needs the quality of equanimity (upekkha) or at least patient endurance.

This entails what is called “going against the stream” – to resist one’s moods, or going against what one was used to in lay life. So we train to go against the grain, even though it can be incredibly difficult. But it isn’t beyond anyone’s capabilities. To go against the grain is something that anybody can do. If we go against our preferences, we get the chance to understand that they are merely sankharas, conditioned phenomena, proliferations that we have been supporting all the time. Giving the sankharas
importance by identifying with them, saying we are like this or this is ours, they became very powerful and are able to tie us down.

So the Buddha taught that we should learn to go against the grain and skilfully develop patient endurance, with mindfulness well established and our minds well focused, especially in situations that we have never encountered before. The process is similar to catching animals in the jungle. Catching a wild animal is not easy. One needs to learn a lot about its behaviour and approach it with gentleness. One needs to be sure that one knows the animal’s behaviour very well until one can approach it.

So we need to observe ourselves. Look at the external side, the way we live our life. If you’ve studied it well, you will know what this lifestyle of a monk is like. Whenever you don’t get what you like, take it as a training in the Dhamma. At least you get some experience and training with the Dhamma of patient endurance. It is exactly when we get used to patiently enduring things that it makes us feel that everything is simply ordinary and not particularly difficult, not something to get agitated about. These situations become easy and they are conducive for a life that pursues liberation. We need to conduct ourselves accordingly and train ourselves, being aware and cautious, practicing to be mindful – mindful not to get lost in worldly attitudes, mindful not to get lost in one’s moods.
“Wealth and Fame”
To live in competition, one supports low-mindedness and uses one’s intelligence in bad ways.
Not many more days and it’s going to be Asalha Puja Day, the beginning of the rains retreat, the *pansah*\textsuperscript{22}. Actually, the day when we enter the rains retreat is the first day of the waning moon of the 8\textsuperscript{th} month. This is when the Buddha said to determine the rains. So now we should start doing all the work that needs to be done before entering the rains. These are communal duties of the Sangha. They benefit the monastic community.

The best way to spend the rains is by performing all the duties of the Dhamma-Vinaya. If there are at least four monks together we can fulfil our basic obligation, the recitation of the *patimokkha*, the formal act of the Sangha in which we recollect our training rules.

The recitation of our rules emphasises our obligations and duties as monks. It helps us to not lose direction in the way we lead our lives and not to give way to heedlessness. If we have strayed off the proper course in the way we live our monastic life, many negative things will happen and things will deteriorate.

To do all the practices needed in daily life – our routines, duties and chores – is something that we will always have to deal

\textsuperscript{22} the yearly monastic rains-retreat, that the monks determine to spend together in one place for three months. Traditionally this is a time of intensive training.
with. In fact, they are all practices towards our physical well-being. At the meal, don’t eat too much. Generally don’t take too much time for eating; try to be finished in 20 or 25 minutes. When one is practicing, one doesn’t give much importance to food.

Luang Por Maha Amorn\textsuperscript{23} wrote some very nice reflections on one of the Dhamma-signs put up on the trees, which, as he hopes, may stimulate a bit of shame and scruple in us, preventing negligence. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
"Some ordain just for food. Having filled up their belly they lie down to sleep – no better than animals. Some ordain wanting to have fun and play around – just like householders. Some ordain lost in delusion – the longer they stay, the more silly they become. If one hopes for magga-phala-nibbana, having ordained, one upholds the Dhamma."
\end{quote}

This is what Luang Por Maha Amorn wrote. It is not good, if we behave like animals in the way we consume things. Only animals compete and snatch away things from each other. For us, we practice maintaining our principles. Competition is not good behaviour. Luang Por Maha Amorn also warned the villagers about snatching away each other’s houses, food and land, sometimes even their partners, as well as fighting for power and control.

\textsuperscript{23} Luang Por Maha Amorn or Tan Chaokhun Mongkonkittithada was a senior disciple of Luang Por Chah. He passed away in November 2010.
When I read those lines, it really stuck in my mind as a warning. Some people never think like that, because it is the nature of animals to live in constant competition. Animals lack a sense of shame and just go ahead and do things. They do things without any wisdom. To live like that, one supports low-mindedness and uses one’s intelligence in bad ways. Whenever we start thinking like that, we need to correct ourselves. Don’t drift off in this direction; don’t fall prey to these things. If there are areas where we have gone too far, we need to try to correct our course.

Now that we are close to entering the pansah, especially this year, there are many requests to Wat Nong Pah Pong from branch monasteries to send some monks for the pansah, so they can hold a kathina donation-ceremony. What’s the point of requesting monks to spend the rains in a monastery only for the sake of the kathina-offerings? We are practitioners. Mostly, those who ask for monks are not prepared to train them, and don’t have the capabilities and knowledge needed to give support to young monks in their growth and development. They keep on asking and the training withers away. The monks that go don’t benefit from it at all – they don’t develop good, beautiful qualities, nor improve their character traits and habits.

What happens is that things go to ruin. The reason for this is that the monks fall prey to cherishing external, material goods

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24 According to the vinaya, it is only when at least five monks have spent the pansah together in a monastery, that this monastery is allowed to receive the usually very generous ‘Kathina-offerings’. The Kathina ceremony takes place once a year and for many monasteries this is the only time when a large amount of donations are made.
(amisa-puja). They fall into what Ajahn Buddhadasa used to call ‘a heap of excrement’. He took this comparison from the discourses of the Buddha – Ajahn Buddhadasa doesn’t speak without foundation – and he quotes from the ‘Discourse of the Dung Beetle’\textsuperscript{25}: a beetle that feeds on excrement. His belly is full and round because of consuming all the excrement.

Are we going to get lost and deluded with things like that? Material possessions and wealth, fame and praise – these are external things. If these things come to us, we should at least keep things within the scope of the supporters’ intentions. They want to enhance good and beautiful qualities. But if we lose ourselves in these things, we won’t develop any of those qualities. We’ll fall into dangerous pitfalls. That’s why the Buddha gave the example of Devadatta\textsuperscript{26}, who came under the sway of wealth, honour and praise. In the end it’s always wealth, honour and praise that ruins things.

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\textsuperscript{25} Samyutta-Nikaya II Chapter VI, 17(Labhasankharasamyutta)

\textsuperscript{26} Devadatta, deluded by the fame due to his psychic powers, tried to kill the Buddha and take over the Sangha without success. Eventually he split the Sangha, and was swallowed up by the earth for this heinous crime.
“Advice on Robe Washing Day”
The Buddha wanted us to reflect on the use of our requisites… although they’re ‘clean’ they are actually not clean.
Advice on Robe Washing Day

From Luang Por’s daily reflections after the meal on May 5th, 2006.

Today is Friday the 5th of May, the 7th day of the waning moon of the 6th lunar month. It is the day when we do the work of cleaning and washing the requisites that we use for covering our bodies, the robes. These things always need washing. They get soiled and stained by this loathsome and filthy thing called our body.

Our body is a dirty and unclean thing. It oozes and drips out of its openings, the ones in the upper parts of the body and the ones in the lower. It excretes filthy stuff even from its pores. This transforms the cloth we use to cover our body into a state where it starts smelling. We all like to see the human body as something nice and beautiful, but the truth is that there is nothing at all about it that is desirable.

The body is a dirty, filthy thing and smells. If we don’t bathe and wash it, it will develop quite a strong smell – similar to uncivilized people that haven’t yet developed in terms of looking after their bodies: hill tribes or people living in the woods, for example. When one meets these tribes, a strong smell tells one that this is an area where there hasn’t yet been any development of hygiene and care for the body. They can live with it, though. They are used to it.

The Buddha taught to take the unattractiveness of the body as an object of meditation, pointing out that its nature is not
desirable. Simply the fact that the body excretes and drives out substances is already something that causes feelings of aversion in us. Nevertheless, we still experience feelings of sensual desire. There are people, though, who become weary and disenchanted with the body, who see its unattractiveness, who see that it is not something that can be considered beautiful in any way.

The Buddha emphasised that we should see the body as an unbeautiful thing. He even admonished one of his monks who gave it too much importance and was attracted to the Buddha’s physical appearance. He scolded him so he would start to reflect: “what is so desirable about such a foul and filthy object?” The Buddha pushed him towards realizing the truth about himself. One shouldn’t be enamoured and infatuated with mind states of desire. These are worldly mind states. If we want peace and seclusion from sensual desires, we need to pay attention to our states of mind.

Living in society, we wash and dye our robes because we want them to be in a condition that isn’t indecent and intolerable for society. That’s why we need to wash them.

We wash our robes with an astringent liquid – the dye made from jackfruit wood, and we have a well set-up place for that, the dyeing shed. Using this method for washing our robes is uncomplicated and there needn’t be any difficulties in maintaining them. Also, we have a limited amount of cloth. All we have is a
lower, upper and outer robe, a waist-band, an angsa\textsuperscript{27}, and a bathing cloth.

But still, the Buddha wanted us to reflect on the use of these requisites – although we keep them in a state which society acknowledges as clean, the Buddha points out that they are actually not clean. In the same way we usually say that after we have had a bath we are now clean. But in fact, we’re not. Because the body itself is a dirty thing. Similarly, no matter how much we wash and dye – things are not clean\textsuperscript{28}. The dirt is right in them. It is like with our robes: In the beginning they are white pieces of cloth. Then we dye them with some dirt that is conventionally known as colour, and stain the whole cloth. And our feelings of what we consider as clean suddenly flip.

Thinking about these things, the Buddha wanted us to reflect on the internal and external conditions (\textit{ajjhatta-} and \textit{bahiddha-dhamma}): both internally and externally, things are all just disgusting. He wanted us to see both as disgusting. This will enable us to experience mind states that are relieved from sexual desires and the cravings and desires that stain our hearts.

So, washing and cleaning counts as one of our duties. Living in such circumstances, we need to take care of our things. We

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{angsa} (Thai): a small rectangular cloth that covers the chest area that is used in Thailand whenever the main robes aren’t worn, e.g. in informal situations, out in nature or at work.

\textsuperscript{28} the traditional method of washing the robes with the yellow water of boiled jackfruit-wood chips is more of a re-dyeing than a washing, since the robes are not rinsed out, as one wants the wash water to remain in the robes because of its astringent properties.
need to look after them, use them and wash or dye them, maintain and clean them, and also clean up the tools in an orderly fashion.

The Buddha wanted us to keep our dwelling and everything in the monastery in an orderly state. This is the way that somebody who keeps sila behaves. It is a way of life that has good standards and is tidy and well organised.

“A monastery, though designed to endure, with temple halls of surpassing beauty, wealthy, with uncountable treasures, becomes ‘good’ in measure only when the monks do their duty, keeping the Vinaya pure.”

We need to be aware of this. Vinaya means being orderly.

There wasn’t much rain last night and the sun has come out, so these are very supportive conditions for drying the robes; there shouldn’t be any problems. We can do our individual chores after robe washing. Everyone does what he can. Don’t forget our obligation to behave properly, and keep living in a way that doesn’t get carried away with fooling around. It is the fooling around that ties up all the beings in the world.

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“Creating Benefit”
If one works without being worried about things, or without much of a critical mind, one can really do things properly.
Creating Benefit

On April 25th, 2006, during his visit to Buddha-Bodhivana Monastery in Melbourne, Luang Por was asked for some advice on how to practice while working. Here are some extracts from his answer:

Venerable Ajahn Buddhadasa gave some good advice on the topic of work:

“We need to work with no feelings of upadana or grasping.”

When I work I am not worrying about anything or thinking much at all. I just keep doing the work, simply for the sake of doing something that is in some way of use to the community. That’s all. I don’t think about whether there is a lot to do or not – that only causes one to worry. I also don’t do things expecting that the outcome will last very long – I just consider that the things we build should be good enough to provide some shelter from heat and cold. Still, I try to do a good job. I guess it does make a difference for the stability of things whether the work was done properly or not. If one works without being worried about things, or without much of a critical mind, one can really do things properly.

Working is similar to when one is travelling; if one doesn’t care about reaching the destination particularly quickly, the distance won’t seem far. But if one wants to arrive quicker than usual, one’s destination will seem far away. It all depends on one’s desires.
When we work, we can pay attention to our different bodily postures and movements. If we maintain awareness of our body, the stress that comes from the power of desire won’t weigh on us. Whether we are sitting, standing, walking or lying down we will feel neutral about it. We can see everything as simply the changing of our bodily posture, work included.

When we work we sometimes experience strong feelings in a way that we wouldn’t have to face otherwise. But when we focus on emptiness while we are working, or when we see work as merely a change of posture, we can turn the experience of work into something good. Also in the case of doing office work or writing, there is not much of a problem, unless we worry a lot. If we worry, things can become difficult. If we don’t add our worries to the things we do, then doing them becomes something absolutely normal.

There are different kinds of work – coarse work, for example, like all the construction work that we do for the sake of providing basic supports for the physical needs of our bodies, the senasana, the monastery buildings, for example. This kind of work demands great sacrifice.

Then there is the work of creating benefit for society, such as teaching Dhamma. The Buddha pointed out certain qualities a Dhamma-teacher should have, for example:

- One shouldn’t hope for anything in reward for teaching Dhamma, but aim only at establishing correct views in a way that is suitable and fitting, and gives rise to useful things.
— *One should teach the Dhamma in a well-reasoned and systematic way, gradually, without omitting points of meaning.*

— *One should not teach for the sake of material gains.*

— *One should not teach praising oneself and making insinuating or denigrating comments about others.*

To teach the Dhamma is also work. But if we keep in line with the Dhamma, unwholesome intentions as the ones mentioned won’t arise. Our intentions are entirely coming from a place of wanting to offer useful improvements and corrections.

When I was living with Luang Por Chah, and was at the age where one is still quite strong, he would sometimes ask me to sew robes for the new candidates that wished to practice and train under the Dhamma-Vinaya temporarily. One year it was forty or fifty sets of triple robes. To sew as much as that, one has to start early every morning. If one does the work harbouring negative feelings about it in one’s mind, one will have to experience feelings of irritation and anger and eventually start complaining. I was able to do the job feeling good. If on one particular day I would finish only a certain amount, I would be alright with just that, continue next day, and just keep on doing the work. I didn’t have any feelings about it. When it was time to stop, I stopped. Luang Por Chah said to do just the amount we could handle. And when the night came, I would spend it quietly keeping up my

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29 a tradition in Thailand: young men to become a monk for at least one rainy season. Well equipped with the basic teachings and practices of Buddhism after such a temporary ordination, a young man is considered to be ready for family life and work.
meditation. So, this is also a kind of work. One has to work with a willingness to help and an attitude of sacrifice in one’s mind. It’s for the good that one sacrifices.

When Luang Por Chah was still young, he was very supportive and helpful when somebody came to live with him. However, it was also the policy to let people spend some time on their own in the beginning. This gave them the chance to test whether they could make it, living in such an unfamiliar place. After they made it, Luang Por Chah would rely on the method of letting people help themselves with all the work and their practice. All this meant giving people the opportunity to live self-reliantly.

As concerns the robe sewing – in the old days they were hand-sewn. One used needles and not machines or the tools we have today. Luang Por Chah would help with the cutting, but one had to do the sewing oneself. Until a robe was finished it took many, many days. Practices like these show how much Luang Por Chah cared about us being able to take care of ourselves.

Concerning the use of our requisites – the ways of putting on the robes and looking after them, or even how we practice with conducting our bodies in all the different postures – Luang Por Chah would give the advice to do things mindfully: sitting with mindfulness, walking and standing and so on, or being mindful when one is putting on the robe. All these practices enable people to become more self-reliant. By taking responsibility for themselves, they won’t become a burden or need others to do things for them. This is also an aspect of ‘work’.
The way Luang Por Chah lived, it wasn’t the case that one didn’t have to do anything. One does work that is of benefit to oneself and to the community at the same time.

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We don’t just let our lives pass senselessly.

We should build up things that benefit us.

The skills we have developed won’t be wasted.
“Reflections after the Patimokkha Recitation”
Reflections after the Patimokkha Recitation

A teaching given after the fortnightly recitation of the patimokkha, the 227 training rules of the monks at Wat Nong Pah Pong on June 26th, 2006.

What we have just listened to are the monastic training rules, or the prohibitions laid down by the Buddha. All these training rules are about actions that should not be done. They are called “akaraniyakicca”, things not to be done. Going ahead regardless, and acting against these rules won’t lead to wholesome feelings, as the Buddha put it. We use these rules as our basis and as our roots, although they are presented in the original Pali language. Pali is a language that has lasted over two thousand years. If we don’t understand the meaning, when we are recollecting and reciting the rules together now, we should look it up in a language that we understand.

We need to give these things attention, as they concern our ethical standards (sila). In order to keep these standards we need to refrain from certain actions and lead our lives possessing Dhamma. This means being equipped with certain qualities. Even for Bhikkhus new to the Dhamma-Vinaya the Buddha specifies certain qualities one should possess.

We understand that the physical, material aspects of our body are merely external things. It is the Dhamma that we need to equip ourselves with in our lives. At the least, we all have to fulfil
certain obligations towards ourselves, and, for fulfilling these, spiritual qualities that we have accumulated (parami\(^{30}\)) come to our support. Our character traits and habits will change accordingly. The principles of practice that we are applying are definitely capable of causing some positive changes in us.

When we practice, we hope and aspire to eventually attain to purity and perfection. This entails putting those teachings into practice which will enable us to experience an understanding of Dhamma. The bodhipakkhiya-dhammas\(^{31}\), one can say, contain some of the best teachings for the training and practice. For example the “Ways to Success” (iddhipadas):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{chanda} (zeal, aspiration),
  \item \textit{viriya} (energy, diligent effort),
  \item \textit{citta} (thoughtfulness, active thought, dedication),
  \item \textit{vimamsa} (investigation and examination).
\end{itemize}

These are all qualities that we need to arouse in ourselves. For example \textit{viriya}, putting forth effort.

In putting forth effort, there needs to be continuity. One needs to put one’s heart into the practice, maintaining an interest and motivation that doesn’t expire. One needs to refine one’s experience by reflecting on Dhamma, investigating the conditions

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\textit{parami} (Pali): the spiritual potential built up in practicing certain virtues.}
\footnote{\textit{bodhipakkhiya-dhammas} (Pali): the “Wings to Awakening”; a group of qualities that the Buddha considered essential for realizing Nibbana, comprising the four satipatthanas, the four sammappadhanas, the four iddhipadas, the five indriyas and the five balas (saddha, viriya, sati, samadhi, pañña), the seven bojjhangas (sati, dhamma-vicaya, viriya, piti, passaddhi, samadhi, upekkha) and the Noble Eightfold Path.}
\end{footnotesize}
that one is practicing with, not letting feelings of discouragement or loss of motivation take over. This definitely needs the quality of patient endurance.

Other qualities mentioned in the “Ways to Success” are also closely related to the quality of putting forth effort. As we might know from our studies, the Buddha gave us some similes for the perfection of viriya in the Jatakas, in the Mahajanaka Jataka\textsuperscript{32}. Relying on effort one eventually succeeds. Just like when learning to chant the patimokkha – a task that is very beneficial for the Sangha – one needs diligence. By application of effort one succeeds in memorizing the patimokkha. This is why the Buddha stated that putting forth effort is a quality that leads to success.

The conditions of our lives, which we should find methods to overcome and become free from, don’t refer to anything other than the two categories of rupa, the physical world, and nama the mental world. The “Four Foundations of Mindfulness” (satipatthana), which are also part of the bodhipakkhiya-dhammas – mindfulness of the body, feelings, the mind, and mind-objects – concern both the physical and mental world. Mindfulness of the body deals with rupa. Contemplating physical form we free ourselves from it and experience not being bound up with delusions and wrong understandings caused by attachment to it. We apply our practice to the body, the rupa-khandha, and create a feeling of not being overly concerned with and worried about it. This is in accordance with the ideals that are appropriate

\textsuperscript{32} the Mahajanaka Jataka refers to one of the ten last lives of the Bodhisatta, in which he perfected viriya-parami (the quality of effort) swimming across the sea for seven days without knowing when he will reach the shore.
for samanas, so we keep practicing in this way again and again, so that feelings of self-importance don’t arise.

Practicing mindfulness of the body, we contemplate “seeing the body in the body” – the body being merely a physical phenomenon that is prone to arising, existing and cessation. We should see the body from the point of view of the Three Characteristics. The body is the way it is, in line with these characteristics and not any other way. This is how we need to contemplate the *rupa-khandha*. The body can’t be otherwise. We should see it as a particular manifestation of Dhamma. It is *anicca, dukkha, anatta*—precisely that. Seeing things like this allows us to experience a way of being where feelings of delusion – or misperceptions where we forget who and what we actually are – don’t arise.

Concerning feelings (*vedana*): feelings are symptoms created by the sense bases. The sense bases are where their origin lies and also their extinction. Feelings arise due to pleasant and agreeable things (*piyarupa* and *satarupa*), phenomena that we encounter in one way or another. The eye seeing something or the ear hearing something can be the cause of both happiness and suffering – pleasant and unpleasant experiences. These are considered “Worldly Dhammas”, worldly ways in which the mind experiences things according to its moods. We investigate these feelings. To say that they are pleasant or unpleasant doesn’t really hold up when we look at them closely. They are merely modes of experience that arise. Feelings are just like waves that build up, roll in and break upon the shore where they eventually

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33 impermanence, suffering and not-self. These are the “Three Characteristics”, or “Three Universal Characteristics”.

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disintegrate into nothing. They are just conditions of experience that arise within the realm of the Three Characteristics. To say that they are happiness or suffering isn’t true, so we neither agree nor disagree with them. These symptoms arise if a person’s mental immunity is still insufficient — if it has weak spots. Agreeable feelings (or “happiness”) and disagreeable feelings (or “suffering”) occur.

This is why the Buddha wanted us to maintain a state that is neither happiness nor suffering, where feelings are simply feelings, with no-one owning them. He encouraged us to see feelings from the perspective of emptiness. When one is empty of feelings, empty of happiness and suffering, there is neither happiness nor suffering. There is simply nature. Neutral feelings like these are what is meant with upakkha-dhamma, the quality of equanimity.

We try to observe ourselves in this way – particularly as we need to constantly keep track of ourselves, with focus and awareness, so as not to be overwhelmed by the power of sensuality, or the power of our desires and defilements. This is how we practice regarding feelings.

It is similar concerning the mind. We need to watch over our mental activities, whether they are wholesome and skilful (kusala), or unwholesome and unskilful (akusala). We observe the wholesome mind with its positive emotions and the unwholesome mind that can take our lives towards defilement, depression, aversion and enmity, when it comes under the sway of biased views or wrong courses of perception (agati).
We need to focus on our mind and observe it. We investigate and look at the mind well grounded in the *vipassana-ñanas*, the nine types of higher knowledge arising from insight\(^{34}\). These insight-knowledges are about nothing else than the Three Characteristics.

The Three Characteristics are like a bright light that enables us to see things in a way in which we don’t need to get involved with or attached to or need to hold on to things. The mind is simply the mind, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. We should not approach it in a way that causes attachment and grasping.

In relation to the objects of the mind (*dhammas*), we need to be possessed with wakefulness and insight – free from the five hindrances\(^{35}\). We shouldn’t allow the hindrances to be present. As long as they are, we are still in a state of being incapable of growth and progress. The hindrances are a barrier that restricts growth, just like a tree that is hindered by some structure is unable to sprout. We shouldn’t allow ourselves to live with the hindrances. We ought to live a life free from the hindrances.

We must endeavour to put forth effort, with diligence and mindfulness – living as one who is awake. Being awake gives rise

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\(^{34}\) Knowledge of contemplation on rise and fall; Knowledge of contemplation on dissolution; Knowledge of the appearance as terror; Knowledge of contemplation on disadvantages; Knowledge of contemplation on dispassion; Knowledge of the desire for deliverance; Knowledge of reflective contemplation; Knowledge of equanimity regarding all formations; Conformity-knowledge and adaptation-knowledge.

\(^{35}\) *nivarana* (Pali): 1) sensual desire, 2) ill-will, 3) sloth and torpor, 4) restlessness and agitation, 5) doubt and uncertainty.
to Right View and feelings of peace. When one has Right View there is no desire and no suffering. Right View is like a light that dispels darkness. The Buddha mentioned this, saying the light of Right View removes the obstacles and destroys the barriers. He said:

“Natthi paññasama abha”
(There is no light equal to wisdom)

We live our lives as one who is awake, who is radiant – like a samana, like one who is possessed with the Samana-Dhamma.

Living according to the Samana-Dhamma, one of the points to reflect on every day is this: as samanas we have a different status from householders. They act, following the influence of defilements and desires. Under the power of craving they are always in need. But we, as samanas, endeavour only for being at peace. Our relationship to the requisites of a monk and the necessities of life is free from likes and dislikes. It isn’t based on desire. Our life isn’t ruled by the power of craving. We live through the power of knowing. This is for our true benefit, and that is why the Buddha pointed it out.

In the daily reflections of a samana, the Buddha reminded us to wisely consider the fact that time keeps passing, so we see that there is nothing really sure and stable in life. It is not just that the time of our lives passes, but along with it, everything that is part of the material world also reveals instability and uncertainty. In the end everything will have to transform into emptiness, a state where a being, a person, a self, or “us and them” can’t be found. We should reflect like this, and find support in heedfulness,
because time keeps passing and passing. We should live with an attitude of practice and willingness to develop, sustaining our life being possessed both of Dhamma and of vinaya, discipline. Having Dhamma-Vinaya is considered a great fortune. It creates a feeling of being on the path leading to maturity and perfection.

Possessing sīla as a treasure means to maintain good manners, behaviour and conduct through all the various physical expressions, or actions of body and speech. Eventually, though, when one attains to perfection, on the level of Unconditioned Reality (asankhata-dhamma), there is only kiriya – mere performance of activities, or functioning. There is nothing that has to do with kamma (volitional action) any more. If one’s actions are still on the level of kamma, they are going to create negative effects in some way or another. In the case of actions that are kiriya, experiences of peace will arise. This arising of peace is called the Unconditioned, a state where there are no mental proliferations, as usually found in the world. Proliferations that create moods in the mind just don’t exist.

So, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are really worth studying, applying, developing and bringing to perfection. All four are synonyms for each other. They are interdependent. Seeing the body, feelings, the mind and the mind-objects should in fact be done in a way similar to the Buddha’s reflections on the law of conditionality, or “Dependent Origination”. How did the Buddha reflect on conditionality? He started with sankharas, proliferations. Āvijja, ignorance, being the cause for proliferations to arise, and proliferations causing consciousness, consciousness causing mind and matter… and so on. This makes us see our lives
in terms of *vatta*\textsuperscript{36}, the “round of change”, with its phases of passing on and beginning again. Ignorance causing proliferations to arise is like darkness causing people to have doubts and uncertainty. It is like being in the dark, where all we can rely on is making assumptions and our suspicions. Walking in the dark one is anxious about all kinds of things. One doubts that one will arrive at one’s destination, one is fearful of all kinds of threats. *Avijja* has got these qualities. Therefore we should live with *vijja* (knowledge), or *vijjacarana*, both knowledge and appropriate conduct.

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We undertake this study and practice together – now it is almost time for entering the rains retreat, which we will spend together with the study of Dhamma and vinaya. Those monks who are still young and physically strong – please try to do your duties. In relation to this, we have just been informed that the Sangha authorities of Ubon would like to know how many patimokkha-chanters there are in each monastery in Ubon-province. To have memorized the patimokkha is a quality that will lead to benefit in many ways. So they asked how many “patimokkha-holders” each monastery has. If you are not physically disabled and your body is still in a state that allows you to learn the patimokkha, you should try. There’s nothing wrong with giving it a try.

Chanting the patimokkha is also a means to overcome the hindrances. If we experience obstacles in the development of the qualities of a samana, we can revert to reciting the patimokkha.

\textsuperscript{36} *vatta* (Pali): the round of existance, or the round of rebirth.
The Buddha once gave Venerable Maha-Moggallana this advice. While Maha-Moggallana was practising in Kallavalaputtagama and his progress was hindered by some obstacles, the Buddha told him to recite principles of the teachings that he had learned in order to dispel the hindrances. In this way the patimokkha can be helpful to our practice.

We should also try to do some further studies. One of the qualifications mentioned by the Buddha of a monk who fulfils the duties of a senior member in the Sangha is to know what constitutes an offence, and the method of resolving it.

Further, the Buddha stated very clearly that a senior monk needs to be one who is possessed with a sense of shame and fear of wrong-doing (hiri-ottappa). One can’t do without these qualities – to be equipped with a sense of shame prevents one from proceeding with incorrect actions, and from transgressing the rules of ethical conduct. This is what is meant by “sense of shame”.

We must continue educating ourselves. This occasion of chanting the patimokkha is an opportunity to demonstrate our skills and show how much dedication we have toward these duties. We don’t just let our lives pass senselessly. We should build up things that benefit us. The skills we have developed won’t be wasted. For sure, there will be situations where we need them. It is like having a good immune-system warding off obstacles. We should make an effort in this area.

Now that the rains retreat is about to begin, there is also an opportunity for some of us to move to other monasteries that offer
good facilities for the development of the Samana-Dhamma, and spend the rains retreat there. We change places in order to experience some new possibilities for developing the practice, our studies and in fulfilling our obligations.

For myself – after spending my first rains at Wat Nong Pah Pong, I went to Wat Suan Gluay. Just a few days before entering the pansah, Luang Por Chah wrote a letter of recommendation and told me to go there. I thought, “Okay, that’s fine – no problem.” So I travelled to Suan Gluay. By coincidence there was a cremation just when I entered the monastery. “That’s a good start,” I thought (Luang Por laughs). Wat Suan Gluay is an old cremation site. I didn’t want to leave the site, thinking that this is a good opportunity, because I wanted to challenge and test myself. In the old days the burning of a corpse wasn’t such a neat thing as today. As soon as the fire was lit, all the people would run away. Nobody would stay. There is a notion that if one stays around, the fire won’t really burn. So everybody had disappeared. When the night came I had my turn to observe things. But there wasn’t anything. There was a tiny bit of fear: I was afraid that some dogs would come searching for something to eat. To go to these places is also a good way of getting to know and train oneself. That year we were sixteen monks and novices spending the rains in Wat Suan Gluay. The huts were just these little shacks. The food was good enough to stay alive from day to day. The stay at Suan Gluay was also good in that it brought the experience of getting to know some of my companions in the monastic life. Before I had always depended on a teacher. Now, at Suan Gluay, I was a senior monk with quite a few rainy seasons. So I did my duty in that position. This is also one of the good aspects of life in another monastery. We get the chance for further training. In that rainy
season I also gave the monks and novices instructions on how to memorize the patimokkha.

So, at this time, as we are about to enter the rains retreat, we’ll be having plenty of opportunities for the development of the Samana-Dhammas.

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Be somebody who conducts himself with a mind standing firm...not becoming overpowered.
“The Ornaments of One Gone Forth”
In the period that we determine to spend the pansah, a period of ninety days, we take up both aspects of the Buddhas teaching: the side of study (pariyatti-dhamma), in which we have to get a bit of a foundation; and the side of practice (patipatti-dhamma), in which we should already know what is what. We rely on this period for developing these two because during this time we don’t need to worry and make plans about what to do and where to go. This cuts off all the problems about the things that we think we need to do when we are following our desires. We rely on this period for doing our duty of changing from the mundane state to one which has more valuable qualities.

We can observe that those principles of life in society, the lay-system, and the principles of One Gone Forth are different. Having come from the lay-system, we are now the Ones Gone Forth. The Gone-Forth-life has ideals, and there are standards of behaviour and practice. Since there are guidelines for behaviour and practice, we follow these ideals and standards of practice. If we were to use our former system of life, the way of life of a layperson, there wouldn’t be much value. We have to keep reminding ourselves that we are now of a different gender than
laypeople or householders\textsuperscript{37}, who do as they like and act according to their moods. But we have standards and principles in the way we live. We are those who see the disadvantages and dangers in the round of rebirth.

We need to have principles in our lives. At least we need sila. Keep in mind that sila is one of the ornaments of One Gone Forth. We need to be cautious and restraint in the way we live, in regard to our manners, our actions and our expressions of body and speech, so they don’t become inappropriate. We need to keep them appropriate. This needs to be cared for and maintained. In our practice we take on the principle of living as one who goes against the stream of lay life and the stream of worldly attitudes. We know what that stream is like. It is constantly influenced by delusions, desires and defilements. It is always lacking and insatiable, like a fire that can never have enough fuel. So we go against the stream and don’t act in conformity with our likes and our moods. We have guidelines for practice, such as the ascetic practices (\textit{dhutangas}\textsuperscript{38}), which are for directing our life as someone who doesn’t follow the stream of the world. We know that the stream of the world is a stream of blindness. It’s a stream in which there is no freedom, in which one is not one’s own master.

We need to change our character and habits, change our feelings, not allowing them to be like those of laypeople who

\textsuperscript{37} In Thailand there is an idiom saying that the “third sex” besides male and female is “ordained”.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{dhutanga} (Pali): austere ascetic practices that the Buddha allowed for shaking off defilements, such as eating only once a day or refraining from lying down.
follow their moods and the stream of their desires. People’s desires are centred around the Worldly Dhammas. These are the things that concern worldly beings. They are all about worldly materialism, the nutriment for beings of the world.

As samanas we have a close look at ourselves, trying to find skilful means that help to relieve and eradicate these desires that stain our minds. We try to reduce the mind states where we crave for entertainment, amusement and diversion and start looking at the world from a perspective that brings relief from desires. This is how we try to see things. The question is, where exactly should we look? In fact we can look towards both material objects, such as the body, and towards the mind and its moods. In one of his similes the Buddha emphasized that we should realize that how we experience things is usually like when we are fascinated by a fancy, dazzling royal chariot. Fools get carried away with such a thing, but, those with understanding won’t see any substance there. We try to see things in a way where we don’t get overpowered by craving when we interact with things.

The Buddha taught us to pay attention whenever material possessions come to us. Even in terms of external things, such as the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and our dwellings, the Buddha wanted us to understand that they are merely elements that simply follow their nature. They keep transforming in a way that we don’t want them to. Contemplating this helps to relieve our eagerness.

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39 Dhammapada verse nr 171
The Buddha instructed that taking delight in sensual pleasures and the desire for more and more of these pleasures are dangers for the Sangha.

We should be determined to look, to know and to see – to see in a way that doesn’t get trapped in the fetters and bonds created by the sense of self. Contemplating and investigating, we allow the sense of self to abate, and eventually be dissolved by understanding the Three Characteristics. This is an aspect of “saccadhamma”, the ultimate truth of nature. Anicca is the state of not being permanent. Anatta is that aspect of nature which doesn’t give rise to the burden of conceit. Ultimately, there isn’t anything that is in a state of true constancy or absolute certainty. Nothing can be called stable or permanent.

Seeing this will bring a relief from those mind states where we delight in things and become deluded. The various forms of ignorance become less. We experience a reduction of heat, a sobering up from drunkenness, and a relief from dukkha.

When we find that we can relate to things in this way, it changes us from the ordinary ways experienced by worldly people, and gives rise to a state that has more valuable qualities, and feels peaceful and cool. The Buddha taught that we need to remind ourselves that we now have a different status than laypeople. We depend upon others for supporting our lives. For this reason we need to develop ourselves into somebody who welcomes whatever he is given happily and does not feel like changing and improving things according to the pull of craving and ignorance. He puts down these feelings and abides in a state which is light and grounded in peace – irrespective of whether what he receives is good or bad. Actually there isn’t anything
good or bad. It is only due to having desires that good and bad come to be. We have to approach and reflect on things like this, which means humbling oneself to becoming one who accepts the truth of nature. Whoever accepts the truth of nature will not get too worked up and will not experience many problems. This is done for the sake of peace of mind, not for anything else. Peace from desires and craving. Peace from the defilements.

We need to develop and recollect the attitude of applying effort, having mindfulness and clear comprehension. This means getting rid of the sense of grasping, as if one was out of one’s mind, always seeking to gain as much as one can, like worldly people do. Rather, we live as ones who have mindfulness, and who recognize the correct measure in the way we lead our lives. We live appropriately. This way of conduct reminds us of being somebody who recognizes how much is enough. One won’t get worked up when one knows the right measure. Having a little is enough, having a lot is enough.

These are some of the qualities and signs of somebody who practices purifying his character and habits. He always reminds himself of these qualities, which are the ornaments of one who has Gone Forth. The outward signs of the body are something that we can all see. They include the robes – things we use to cover ourselves to protect us from heat and cold, but there also need to be inner signs of the qualities of Dhamma. At least we should foster the beauty that comes from having intentions that are grounded in a sense of shame. Having a sense of shame enables us to restrain ourselves from falling into what is evil or bad.
The Buddha held that having a sense of shame is like a goad for forcing an ox to pull its cart towards its destination. This is known as sila, observing virtuous conduct, or maintaining standards of practice, which are harmonious and which cause beauty to arise. Walking – one is beautiful, standing – one is beautiful, sitting – one is beautiful, speaking – one knows the right amount. It makes one feel that the aspects and signs of a samana are present in every way. This requires being one with a sense of shame, somebody who has got sila. We consider this to be one of the constituent factors of our Going Forth, of our practice.

As concerns meditation: having mindfulness is really necessary. Mindfulness is a dhamma that gives great support. We must know the flow of the mind, the flow of defilement and craving, the flow of the world. Not making ourselves like a water hyacinth – going up whenever the water level rises, and going down whenever it falls. If there’s delusion letting it be just delusion, if there is mindfulness letting it be just mindfulness. We need to know how to go against the stream, have mindfulness and clear comprehension, not to be fooled by the world, not to be mislead by moods such as praise, blame, gain and loss. We shouldn’t feel obliged to go along with everything, but have a sense of self-discipline, being able to tame our minds (dama). If we get what we wish, we get what we wish. It’s just that. If we don’t get what we wish, so be it. We need to know how to put things down, how to abandon them.

This should be sufficient to create the feeling of being one’s own refuge, of not being fooled by the world or by moods. Be somebody who conducts himself with samadhi – with a mind standing firm, mind-objects standing firm – not becoming
overpowered and lost. Develop the quality of resoluteness. We have immunity and we have firmness. To have immunity is something very valuable. It needs to be trained and learned. These are aspects of our being samanas, being ones who have Gone Forth.

Some of our views may lead us into ways of thinking that aren’t right or appropriate. Then we should remind ourselves of nature, seeing things in a way that accords in with nature. In the words of the Buddha “having wisdom and all-around knowledge of this heap of sankharas”. Sankharas are compounded things. This needs to be understood on the basis of the experience of impermanence (anicca). Certainly, there are states that are hard to endure, but there are also the states where there isn’t anything at all. We try to focus on seeing things in this way, letting our understanding be a factor that influences our way of living.

We also need to be aware of the conventions that govern the way that we live together with other people. If that’s not the case, we won’t attain freedom. To like certain people one moment and later hate them is like a virus causing damage to us and keeping us from a state of peace. That’s why we need to know, watch and observe things that are related to us. Bit by bit we have to put our hearts into those things.

If there are times when our behaviour or our actions aren’t good, our friends in the Dhamma might caution us or criticize us. Then we have to know how to accept it, not just taking our own feelings as a basis, or taking self (atta) as our principle. We need to know how to relax, whether the criticism is right or wrong. We need to be humble and lower ourselves first. If the criticism is
right, we really need to accept that there are still parts of ourselves that we have to face with humbleness.

Our practice relies on following certain ways that uphold the training. Our lifestyle needs to be supported by the activities of a samana. Getting up early we recognize straight away that we need to change our attitude towards things, not giving them too much importance and not grasping onto them. We remind ourselves that the days and nights are relentlessly passing. What does this mean? It is a way to see that the passing of time very clearly reveals the truth. It really speaks for itself: the days and nights are passing, relentlessly. Even the parts of us that we understand as the physical world are still going to end and deteriorate; changing into a state where there is nothing that belongs to oneself. What can we expect from something like that?

So, taking up contemplations like this is done for the sake of uprooting the conceit “I am” (asmimana), a view that seems to be controlling us all the time. We really have to pull it out through living as One Gone Forth. One who possesses guidelines for his behaviour and practice. The way we lead our lives has to be like this.

We understand that living like this involves changing our character and habits towards seeing the disadvantages and dangers in the round of rebirth. All of us already know that this danger isn’t anything far away. It is in fact the danger of ignorant mind states that are associated with greed, hatred and delusion. Just this is the danger. And just this is what forces us to live in a state where we are tortured, unable to experience freedom. That is why the application of effort is considered something so good,
valuable quality that we can derive great benefits from. It eliminates the problem of getting lost and heading for dukkha.

Applying effort means living in a way that is not careless. Just that. When we relate to external objects in our lives we relate to them as someone who has mindfulness and wisdom. In the same way we relate to conventions. This leads to peace and enables one to experience happiness. This happiness is not dependent on worldly or material things, but on the application of energy and effort.

Since we live as a society or group we have to take on agreements and a variety of duties for our living together. Whatever is communal activity we should not hesitate to help each other with, especially concerning the application of effort in meditation. Each day there should be an occasion of putting forth effort together in order to build up strength and energy. We don’t always sit meditation together, only at certain times. In the language of the Buddha, building up strength and energy together like this is called *sangha-anubhava* (the power of the Sangha). If we do something we do it through the power of the Sangha. The sitting meditation we do all together. In any activity which supports the development of communal harmony we try to do our part, but if nature (*i.e. one’s health*) isn’t supportive, one has to accept that it is too much, going beyond one’s ability. An example of this is related in the vinaya. It concerns our use of the requisites to cover ourselves, the robes. The Buddha forbade us to be without the three robes, even for one night, but he did allow us to be without them if our body and our form-elements are in a state of deterioration. This is about nature and the fact that it is beyond the range of one’s control. But if one is still in a healthy state, the Buddha advised us not to be careless, and to live in a way where
we put our hearts into looking after and protecting our requisites – for the purpose of developing ourselves. We need to have things to cover ourselves. If we stay far away from these things they may get lost or disappear. Somebody who wants our robes might come and take them. We aren’t allowed to beg for new robes then. This is something that we have to consider very well. If this happens, it might make us break our precepts. At the very least we’ll have to go and request replacements from somebody else, either from a relative or non-relative, or from the communal stores. As we are training to change our character and habits we don’t request or do anything motivated by craving.

Don’t go and use all the different tricks of deceit and ways of acting based on craving. We should be as straightforward as possible, not making excuses in this way or that. One can’t do that – finding excuses… we’ve been excusing ourselves for a long time already and it just reinforces bad habits, the habits of a fool. Now who’s going to do this? Our training has to have resoluteness. To be resolute means to possess strong mental determination. This can cut off those problems that give rise to degeneration and decay. This is what it depends on: it depends on the actions that we do. Just that.

Concerning our chanting now, during the time that we determine the pansah, we have to pay attention to the proper time and place for coming together. This is something that is considered part of the training of the new monks, but it also means maintaining our communal duties as a Sangha. This is another factor of the practice.
Something else that we consider to be part of the season of pansah is that we will have studies related to the *pariyatti-dhamma* – the vinaya, the training rules, concerning the things that the Buddha forbade us to do – for the sake of support and for bringing our knowledge to a deeper level. The vinaya is all about our bodily, verbal and mental actions. One can say it is something that affects all aspects of our lives.

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Today we have come together to determine the pansah. Right now my health is a state which can definitely be called “not sure”. It is in a state of degeneration related to the pumping mechanism, the motor inside the heart. The condition of the heart isn’t good. The muscles of the heart are weak. These muscles don’t have adequate strength to effectively function – to pump. The heart doesn’t contract as forcefully as it should. So I had to rely on consulting those who have sufficient experience and knowledge. They said the system is not capable of ejecting all the fluid out of the heart. This causes fluid to back up, to accumulate in the heart. This further weakens the heart causing it to become enlarged and there is the possibility of it stopping to work – which in technical terms is called having “congestive heart failure” – suddenly and unexpectedly. All this is merely a matter of nature. I think of it like this. It’s about the process of deterioration in nature, but being in a position of living in a society, one can’t just let go. So, if only for that reason, one needs to know how to nurse, maintain and cure as much as one is able to support it.

These are some of the issues concerning this body that I’m facing now. I’m telling you this to let you all know. It isn’t
anything that’s far away. Concerning other inner organs, like the liver, lungs and kidneys, they are still functional. But the system of the heart is damaged, simply that. There’s the chance of complete failure. This can happen, suddenly. There’s nothing difficult about it, it’s not hard, and it’s good in that there will be no pain. Only the breathing becomes quicker, that’s all. We went to see the doctors and they said these will be the symptoms preceding total heart failure. I have the feeling that the tests, checks and things that they have observed support this diagnosis.

Regarding the fact that we are living together, we have come together now for determining pansah, in order to create feelings that give rise to concord and unanimity in the principles of Dhamma-Vinaya. So today we will do this act of determining the pansah with each other as witnesses. We understand that this is a special occasion in this period.

I don’t have much more, so I won’t say much more. It is appropriate. If I speak a lot it also uses a lot of energy, so I’d like to use this occasion to express my appreciation for all of us who have come together for determining the pansah, doing the duty of changing our characters and habits and leading our lives as those who see the disadvantages and dangers in the round of rebirth. Doing so, we can be a bit of a light for others, for the people in the world, so that they may open up their eyes and ears; because just as the external light is capable of giving support and convenience, the light inside is capable of making the hearts of people in society change. May you all have happiness that is without any dukkha. With your permission, I will end now.

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If one is able to change and leave behind the emotions of an ordinary person, that’s something amazingly strange.
“Different from Ordinary People”
Different from Ordinary People

A teaching given at Wat Nong Pah Pong after the patimokkha on August 26th, 2003.

Now we have reached the half-way point of the pansah. The ceremony of entering the rains was 1½ months ago. Another 1½ months and the rains period is over. If we all practice continually and make a habit of putting forth effort, this will be sufficient to change our behaviour to some extent. At least the practice with the conditioned physical form of our bodies is well within our abilities to change. But it takes time for us, who have just come here to this lifestyle, to follow the principles of the Buddha with all the methods of practice for leading this life. It takes time, especially if one has been closely linked to friends and relatives, to free oneself from worries. We have become acquainted with and accustomed to places and people, so it takes time before we can change. It is only after a long time that we can see that we don’t need to worry about the situations that our old friends and relatives are in. It is very difficult to develop this unconcerned feeling towards people we have been closely linked to. It is not easy. When we study how the Buddha trained himself in his practice, we see that it takes a long time to abandon these feelings of being bound up and tied to ones old life. So for us, it should be similar: it will take us some time until we can let go of the things that bind us to people and places that we used to relate to.

So I’d like all of us to develop a mind that doesn’t follow wrong courses of perception (agati-dhamma). Normally we do have these mistaken perceptions. Our views are not the true
Dhamma; we are prejudiced. If one sees things from an angle without preconceptions, one can see the way things really are. An example is our living together: if we look at the physical features of people, or the conditions of their bodies, everybody is different. There are big and small people. The colour of the skin is not the same. There are many differences all the way up to people’s voices and the languages they use for communication. In these aspects, each individual is unique, but if we see things in the light of Dhamma, in terms of form, elements and aggregates – everybody is the same. We chant this in the “five subjects for frequent recollection”: we all age, become sick and become separated when we die – all the same for everyone.

From this point of view, the feeling of being especially close to certain persons won’t arise. We see everybody in the same way. Actually, everybody is our relative in terms of nature, or concerning our true situation, the saccadhamma, the truth of the reality of life. If we can manage to realise this aspect of nature, we will be possessed of a mind that isn’t prone to seeing others with perceptions of being better, worse, or on the same level. The term for these biased perceptions is mana, conceit. The Buddha wanted us to observe what kind of form mana takes. Thinking “I’m not like this or that person” will eventually lead to seeing others as either good or bad. It will lead to accepting or resenting them. When such mind states arise, we need to put things in the right perspective, a perspective that is based on saccadhamma, the truth of reality in its universal scope. From this angle, states of mind that are free from aversion, where we neither denigrate nor praise others, will come about naturally. We see others as part of nature, as perfectly right and appropriate. The Buddha called this the attitude of somebody who has Right View. It is the mind state of a
person that is accomplished and pure in the qualities and virtues of a true Sangha member.

Speaking of ‘Sangha’; it is worth mentioning that Sangha doesn’t have anything to do with specific, individual monks. When speaking about the Sangha in its conventional sense (sammuti-sangha), the Buddha didn’t refer to certain monks. Sammuti-sangha merely means a group of four or more monks; a sufficient number to be able to perform communal duties. This is one way the Buddha defined ‘Sangha’. But in what the Buddha called the ariya-sangha, the group of the Noble Enlightened Beings, the word ‘Sangha’ is related to their realisations of the Dhamma. In that context the Buddha did refer to certain individuals: those that no longer fall under the power of the Worldly Dhammas, or those that are not prone to agati and therefore progress with right practice – namely: those who walk the Middle Way. The Middle Way doesn’t follow the course of Worldly Dhammas. These are the paths of householders and ordinary unenlightened beings. If our behaviour is not yet accomplished in the Dhamma, there will always be elements of agati. So in this matter of changing one’s behaviour, what we should do is have a look at ourselves and evaluate our own feelings. Observing other people can take us far away from relating to ourselves in a way where we can see the Dhamma.

This is an interesting aspect of Dhamma: how is it possible that good and bad feelings arise, or happiness and suffering? Happiness, according to our way of thinking, is positive, and for us who haven’t yet reached the level where one truly feels content, anything that is dukkha is undesirable. But those who are accomplished and free from the mind states of worldly,
unenlightened people would maintain that even sukha is something negative. They would see neither sukha nor dukkha as something positive. The Buddha still considered feelings of appreciation as dangerous. They are another aspect of dukkha. Only because we agree to this type of dukkha, we say it’s positive. There has to be peace from sukha and dukkha, peace from good and bad, peace from agreement and disagreement. This peace arises from seeing things in the light of the nature of reality.

This is how we should observe things. One needs to be well aware of the different kinds of angles from which one looks at things. This is why the Buddha taught us to live grounding ourselves in attention and heedfulness, looking at the world and all the mind states that arise in ourselves. If the things that occur in our mind arise in a peaceful way, without proliferating or fantasizing about the Worldly Dhammas, they can potentially provide peace and happiness for us. This is what is called “seclusion from the sankharas” in the Buddha’s words – seclusion from the proliferating mind states.

This is something that is hard to put into words: if there is no mental proliferation, how is it possible for somebody to act at all? One can understand it in this way: those who don’t have any activity of mental proliferation carry out their actions with a state of mind that is perfected with what the Buddha called kindness, friendship, and helpfulness, or metta. Metta means wanting to be useful to those people that are still in a state of danger – wanting similar benefits to arise in them. You could call it the intention of a real grown-up person. It is the way the Buddha acted. In that sense, when one pursues the peace that arises from separation from the defilements (upadhi-viveka), peace means peace from the
mind states of a normal, unenlightened being – where the mind experiences greed, disagreement or all kinds of negligence and errors.

Peace from these defilements arises because of seeing their drawbacks, dangers and inappropriateness. The Buddha’s mind was secluded from defilements in just this way. Looking at the way he lived, however, the Buddha seemed just like an ordinary person. He needed clothes to cover his body, ward off cold, heat, mosquitoes and gadflies. He ate food for sustaining the physical condition of his body, eating in moderation, consuming it only for stilling the hunger that arises due to the work of the body’s digestive system, and not overcome by desire. His dwelling place could be considered ‘good enough’. It was merely a shelter from sun and rain, a place of relief from having exposure to insects. It couldn’t be called ‘good’ by worldly standards. The Buddha was indifferent towards it. He lived just well enough to sustain his life and to have some relief from the heat and cold that nature brings, from the sun and the rain. The same with medicines: the Buddha wouldn’t use medicines thinking of curing his illnesses – but only for the sake of a little relief, as the situation of having to experience the physical conditions of a body always has to involve constant changes, according to causes and conditions. Eventually the physical body will have to reach its end, disintegrate and transform into its original state: earth goes to earth, water to water, wind to wind, and fire to fire. Seeing that this is the way it goes, the Buddha didn’t think of his physical body being a “person” or an entity in and of itself. The body is merely a manifestation of the elements and khandhas – arising,
existing, and ceasing to be. From this perspective there is nothing that is to be assumed as a self – whether relating to the rupa-khandha, the vedana-khandha, or sankhara-khandha.

The Buddha saw that the khandhas comprise a way of being that follow causes and conditions – arising, existing and ceasing. A mode of being which can’t be considered a being or a person at all. Because the Buddha saw things from this perspective, he was able to experience true peace. When we study aspects like this, we need to do it with an attitude that doesn’t allow mindfulness to slip. We need to maintain mindfulness and clear comprehension, in a way that immediately understands the world and our states of mind, knowing them the way they are. We know what people are like, and realize how the world truly is.

One who understands the world and knows the truth about it is able to still his feelings towards it. This means looking at things with an attitude of practice, following the ideal of heedfulness. It is a way of keeping track attentively, with comprehension and vision, just like it is expressed in an old saying: “to keep looking until it is revealed, to keep addressing it until it works, and keep using it until one can handle it well”. Practicing in this way, benefit will come naturally for both ourselves and for others. It really means that one is capable of looking after oneself. It’s as simple as this.

So these are some of the principles that we cultivate and give importance to. If one is able to realize peace and liberation from sañña or memory/perception, sankhara or mental formations and viññana or consciousness.
suffering, one changes from being an ordinary person in an unusual way. In the ordination ceremony, when a young man enters the new gender of being a celibate, he is required to be a ‘complete male human being’ (*puriso*). But this only refers to the common features and conditions of an ordinary male human being. Strangely enough, real completion actually goes against one’s biological nature. One isn’t misguided any more by one’s own biological conditioning.

The same is true for the mind with its various moods. If one is able to change and leave behind the emotions of an ordinary person, that’s something extraordinary. One can’t say one feels good, because one doesn’t see anything ‘good’ there. And instead of feeling bad, one sees that there isn’t anything ‘bad’ there either. One merely sees these feelings as modes of being, states that are neither good nor bad. One’s mind doesn’t behave in terms of approval or disapproval. This is an effect of experiencing seclusion – seclusion from the world.

This is also something unusual: if one trains in being continuously observant, then even while one is asleep, one is able to remain watching. Those experiences that concern the body, relate to the body. Whatever ‘the one who knows’ experiences, relates to the ‘one who knows’. One eventually needs to separate it out: what concerns the body is just a matter of the body, and what concerns the mind is just a matter of the mind. Following the Buddha’s guidelines indeed leads one in very unusual directions. This is the nature of this training. It leads all the way to becoming awake, to the arising of maturity and to fulfilment and completion. Therefore we try to take every opportunity, to study and to observe. We study right at our six senses. The Buddha didn’t want
us to study anywhere else, but to see what is happening at our sense bases. This is something that we ought to know thoroughly.

Another unusual occurrence comes along when we experience a very pure state of feeling and view, a strange or ‘mysterious’ phenomenon arises in the form of gladness and bliss. But it is not so that we become obsessed with feelings of liking experiences like this. As I see it, such states of gladness and bliss have to do with a person’s previous wholesome behaviour (upanissaya). Whatever it is that we have invested importance into will eventually manifest at the right opportunity. The Buddha refers to such an experience as ‘vasana’, a gift of merit from the past. One can see it like that. Not every monk is equally well-gifted. Even the noble disciples in the Buddha’s time weren’t all the same.

Just look at Luang Por Chah. When I was spending time with him, I could see that he definitely had some very special gifts. From what I observed, it was quite special that the people who came to pay respects and visit never felt bored or fed up with him – they wouldn’t even think of these feelings. This is one of the aspects of vasana.

His special qualities also created good opportunities for him to be useful to others. Even though his activities mostly took place in the period of his life when he wasn’t yet old, they were still of great and long-lasting benefit. It is a fact that we have received our style of practice from him, and even today, his principles in the Dhamma are still preserved by various means. We can still hear his voice. Or, in terms of the monastery regulations, standards and routines that he guided us in, we still reap benefits. He really laid good foundations. For example, our practices
toward material gains or fame and reputation that arise from offerings made, Luang Por Chah wouldn’t let these fall to any individual. He always tried to designate them for communal purposes.

We also need to recollect his spiritual practice and the qualities of Dhamma that he realised. Even in the time when his conditioned physical body deteriorated, he never showed such symptoms visibly, or displayed a state that gave rise to aversion. It is noticeable that those who were involved in looking after him and nursing him during his illness never experienced feelings of being weary or fed up with it. He also never showed any extreme reactions. All this is part of vasana.

Also, Luang Por Chah possessed an aspect of the four analytic insights (patisambhida), which are; ready wit, initiative, creative and applicable insight (patibhana), and he was skilled in using speech in all kinds of ways. This definitely enabled great benefits to arise.

Then there was his relationship to his fellow monastics. All these are factors of vasana, the gifts of an individual person. So when we train, things are similar. We need to see that the practice also depends upon each and everyone’s individual qualities.

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“From the Darkness to the Light”
When we are fully present, our mind is like a flame when the wind is stilled. The flame is unmoved and upright in itself and light blazes in all directions.
From the Darkness to the Light

Excerpts of a Dhamma talk given to the monks, novices and nuns after the ceremony of asking forgiveness at the annual retreat of Luang Por’s disciples at Wat Nong Pah Pong on September 12th, 1996.

In our practice we constantly have to remind ourselves that all of us need to begin like children. We can’t be like adults right from the start. At first we are not yet purified and keep falling into states of dirtiness. We live in the mud and mire like a lotus that hasn’t yet bloomed and still depends on the dirt for nourishment. We are the same – when we are born in the world we are not yet fully mature, ready and complete, but come with the burden of having to fight obstacles of all kinds. There is happiness and suffering, good and bad, right and wrong. To experience this is normal for an unenlightened person, who still has dust in his eyes. That someone who has dust in his eyes could experience the brightness and clarity of being unburdened with suffering and drawbacks cannot be. In the beginning there are always hardships, there always has to be suffering – this is just normal.

It’s like we live in the dark. Living in the dark is not as pleasant as one might wish. There is always a certain feeling of discomfort and uneasiness. In this state we are still not free from dependence, are not yet wholly accomplished. We still experience a bit of happiness and a bit of suffering from time to time, some satisfaction and dissatisfaction. We haven’t yet transcended the world of conditions and are not yet in a safe place. We are going back and forth in samsara, the round of birth and death.
Sometimes the situations that arise are good, sometimes bad. In our lives we are not going smoothly over all the ups and downs. Until we reach the aim of our practice this is naturally just the way things are.

Although we accept that anything that is still in a stage of development is not yet as good as it ideally should be, we still need to make changes and improvements. And for doing this we need to know what we are supposed to do, so we can try to direct the development towards our aim. Whatever doesn’t accord with our plan, we seek to put down, keep away from, or not respond to. The things which aren’t alright will come to an end in this way. They won’t be allowed to become part of our behaviour patterns or habitual attitudes.

Everybody has goodness, everybody has perfection and purity right inside himself. Surely every one of us possesses at least some personality traits which could be brought into awareness in a way that is useful for oneself. Make these complete and perfect them. It is like with the flames of a fire: in the places where the flames rise up there wasn’t any fire before. But once they are ignited and kindled, the flames appear out of the darkness – and eventually the flames are burning right there. With us it’s the same as with the flames: everyone of us has to come from dark places, come from being a child, being someone who has no strength, is not yet mature. Naturally, of course, this brings disorientation. That someone at this level could experience full confidence and clarity just can’t be. To be able to experience purity straight from the start is impossible. One has to gradually develop oneself like this.
Until the state of perfection is reached, we need to understand the situation we are in, and that it is normal to experience both happiness and suffering. We still need to find means to improve ourselves. We can use the guidelines the Buddha established for us monks in order to correct the shortcomings and faults in our actions. Inabilities, negligence and thoughtlessness in our behaviour can make us feel very inappropriate. But we have the chance to open ourselves up to the friends we live together with, to let them know about our deeds. We can confess or speak up in a meeting, letting the others witness our actions, saying words like:

“What I have done here was careless and wasn’t right. I have transgressed a rule of conduct. That wasn’t good. What I have done wasn’t appropriate for someone who lives by the ways of a Samana, who practices for the sake of penetrating dukkha with clarity and insight.”

By letting others know and be a witnesses in this way, we implant our principles deeply into our memory, building up our capacity to be aware of what we are doing and gradually creating a sense of shame. If we are grounded in this sense of wholesome shame, shying away from things that could cause us problems becomes natural. Seeing dangers and disadvantages will keep us alert and attentive. This alertness is the way leading to the experience of freedom and safety. It leads to the attainment of the “non-suffering”, the “unburdened”. This is the way to fulfil our task in the practice and development of ourselves.

In the beginning of the practice, we always do things according to the standards and rules, similar to a fighter preparing
to enter the ring. First, he trains strictly according to the rules and regulations. But when he really faces the fight, he sometimes goes beyond the rules. But in our case, everything must remain within our general principles – principles that aim at peace and cessation and lead us to freedom from danger and enmity. For determining these principles, the Buddha gave us the criteria:

*Any Dhamma that reduces the desires that stain our hearts won’t deviate from the principles of the Buddha’s teachings.*

There are many skilful means and tools in the Buddha’s teachings for correcting our actions, for destroying and abandoning confusion and unpeaceful, unhappy states in oneself. These tools are needed, and none of them transgress the general principles that the Buddha proclaimed. They are the Buddha’s recommendations, so we should put them into practice.

Our mind usually likes to get carried away with having fun. If we find ourselves infatuated with amusement, take it as important and hold on to it, the Buddha recommends grounding ourselves in an attitude of alertness. Amusement is a snare. It can drag us onto the path of foolishness. When we are infatuated and crazy about something, we can go wrong anywhere. Whether in the hidden or in the open, it’s all the same – it’s really like when one is drunk.

People get drunk with their bodies due to the perception that the body doesn’t have illnesses, afflictions, pains and fevers threatening it. They think they won’t die, won’t degenerate and wear out. They don’t consider the possibility, but it happens. Because in reality our physical body is a conditioned
phenomenon, it will always follow the nature of its material constituents. Nevertheless we like to see the body as permanently powerful, tough and strong, not afflicted by disease and pain. We want to see it in this perspective, the way we are used to seeing it, just as if the body was fit for all circumstances. But the Buddha said, if there is light, there will be darkness. If there is hot, there will be cold. It has to be like this. So in this very way, any state of strength, agility or ease may degenerate in just a single day or just a single moment into a state of decline and ruin, becoming deteriorated and worn out. It’s just following its nature. But if we cultivate an attitude of seeing the disintegration of the body as natural, we won’t be upset by the decline. We won’t take the body as something important, something to keep holding on to, or attaching feelings of self to it.

The Buddha called the illusions we create around the body sakkayaditthi – the view that the body is self, that we and other people are our bodies, that the body is our possession. The Buddha reminds us to keep recollecting that whatever thing there may be, it is not ours, not our self. Nothing really belongs to us. Thinking like this prevents wrong courses of perception (agati-dhamma) from gaining power. One can easily get lost in these perceptions. They stimulate feelings of self-importance in us. So the Buddha taught to counter them by reflecting in one’s mind that there is nothing that really belongs to us. Through thinking like this we won’t start holding on to things. Attachment is the root of all self-importance.

The more we take ourselves as important, the more we are prone to drifting away towards unwholesome feelings, towards suffering, until we finally follow the path into the realms of
darkness. In this way we drift along the round of birth and becoming. The Buddha saw this as the source of all suffering. States of anger, greed or delusion come to be. Desire, aversion and ignorance arise. All of these states of being entail suffering and unhappiness.

By analyzing and observing our personality we see that it consists of what is called namadhamma. Mental phenomena are also not ours, not our self. Our personality is not “we” or “they”, but simply consists of certain combinations of all the possible mental states. Don’t see it as “this is me” or “this is mine”. See it in the light of mental states which arise naturally on their own and then cease on their own. Just like the darkness comes to be naturally, it goes naturally as well. As brightness is born in its own natural way, it likewise ceases. These states arise and vanish.

Mental states arise and cease, whether they are states of happiness or suffering, agreeable states (ittharammana) or disagreeable states (anittharammana). These two are what we call the Wordly Dhammas, attributes that dominate the hearts and minds of beings living in the world. Seeing the Wordly Dhammas simply as elements of nature, we won’t make the assumption that we are happy whenever we feel happiness, or that we are suffering whenever we feel suffering. There is nothing like our goodness or our badness either. We see these attributes, but they are just aspects of Dhamma. Each being merely one of the possible states of Dhamma. There is nothing special about it.

Feelings are just feelings, happiness is just happiness, suffering is just suffering. Only that. Having arisen, it all ceases. We don’t have happiness and suffering. We don’t take interest in them.
They are just attributes of the mental objects that come up – just that much. The Worldly Dhammas appear and vanish according to their own conditions. Finally, if we don’t show interest in them, don’t support and give importance to them, they lose their existence.

The fantasies our mind spins, the *sankharas*, can be seen in a similar way. *Sankharas* are states of proliferation. They come and disturb us all the time, and by giving importance to them, we keep feeding them. So of course they continue to provoke and challenge us. Naturally, then, we are constantly subject to feelings of up and down and states of confusion. We don’t have freedom. We are not even a refuge to ourselves for a second, due to the importance we give to these states of mind.

The Buddha teaches us to be aware that *sankharas* are impermanent states. They are not durable. We shouldn’t build up the perception that they last forever. It’s their characteristic that having arisen they cease. We should see *sankharas* as being nothing more than changing states of the elements, nothing but nature in the end.

We aspire to experience full accomplishment in the Dhamma. At least, we’d like to have mindfulness and clear awareness of ourselves, so we start the training from this place. Normally, people start off with their emotions and moods, letting them lead the way. The people out in the world think their moods are what counts. But emotions and moods are illusions that deceive us. They are tricky. Sometimes they take us on a good path, sometimes on a bad one. Following our moods easily turns to our disadvantage. We should take superior states of mind rather than
moods and emotions as our guide. Why not let the one they call “Awakened” and “Blessed” lead us? Let “Buddha” walk in front of us. Let “Buddha” be the leading principle. Let “Buddha” be our guideline. Whatever we do, there will always be moods, so we should see through them by being in a state of awareness. In this way there is no danger. There are no drawbacks. We are on the alert.

Let the various moods and emotions that come up simply be as they are. In this way we train to really be with ourselves. We train this very self to sit and really be there, to stand and really be there, to walk and really be there, until at all times, in whatever changing posture, we can be called fully aware. We are fully there by way of our peace. It’s different from being on top of our experience through getting carried away with pleasures and having fun. Instead, being fully present with life comes from peace of heart. If there is peace, we are in a state where we can adjust to anything that comes up, so we will always respond appropriately. That people attain to Right View and Right Understanding is because the *sankharas* are quiet. They don’t have mental proliferations. Therefore they experience peace. With all the kinds of opinions that could come up, they won’t start arguing.

When relating to the world and society, those who are intelligent, understanding and have a feeling of peacefulness will praise us. But if they should praise us, we don’t get happy because of it. We don’t get infatuated with it. Ultimately, the praise of someone is just a product of the delusion of the one who expresses it. Just that much. We don’t have feelings of like and dislike. Praise is just what it is. We don’t feel that we need to foolishly run
after it. We don’t want to get on the track of being a slave. If we maintain our peace, there is nothing that can do us harm. Even if others should blame, criticize or condemn us, making us subject to suspicions out of enmity, we nevertheless have peace. We have peace towards the mental states we don’t wish to have (anitttharammana), which don’t go according to our likes. Even they can’t cause us harm and hurt us. Should someone criticize us, it’s just that much. Eventually it all dissolves by itself. It flows away on its own. This is where the Worldly Dhammas can’t dominate us, since we have nothing but peace in our hearts.

When standing, when walking, when sitting, when sleeping and when getting up, this is it. If we deal with society, and with things in the world around us, we can relate in a way that is of benefit for all. We don’t go astray and drift off. We behave like one who can let things be. We behave like Samanas or anagarikas, those who are not bound up. This is the way we train. Training ourselves like this is really peaceful. We make peace arise all the time. Whenever we are in society, we will always have steadiness and calm.

We might not have succeeded yet in our aim to experience the feeling of peace. If we haven’t yet, we can at least try and practice to imagine the state of peace. Practicing to write all the letters of the alphabet is similar: First of all, we need to follow the method given to us. The lines we draw sometimes turn out straight, and sometimes not. Sometimes the result is good, sometimes it’s not good, but it’s enough to make sense, it is usable. In our training and practice, even if we get lost in our moods from time to time, we notice it immediately. So what... If we get lost in our moods, we just “reset” to start anew. Be up to knowing your state of mind.
Don’t lose yourself. Only observe the emotions, observe the mind, observe and watch out for the sankharas. If we have the determination to observe ourselves in this way, we allow correct knowledge and vision to arise, according to the reality of existence.

Seeing it like this, I would say, gives us an understanding of the way to let things be Dhamma – it gives us a feeling for the state where we are Dhamma. If we truly are Dhamma, external things, the realm of forms and conditions (rupa-khanda-sankhara), our living in society, and objects around us are no problem – they won’t make us struggle. There is no confusion, no happiness, no suffering, no delight, no sorrow. There is nothing which can give rise to feelings of conflict or aversion. Everything flows naturally following the force of this state of peace. Everything dissolves through the power of peacefulness. Nothing really matters, there is nothing to gain. It’s not essential, it’s uninteresting. We don’t find all those things that we were interested in when we were children attractive anymore. There is nothing about the world that can overwhelm us, there is nothing that can make us go wrong. Not to fail is really a good thing. This is indeed something we could rightly accept praise for – but there is no one to praise. It just praises itself, just like the name and the qualities of the Buddha that we recite together in the chant on the Nine Qualities of the Buddha. The praise is intrinsically there through itself.

People who have no problems, who don’t have dukkha can be said to be free from having kilesas, but actually they live together with them, only that there’s nothing to them. This has to do with one’s delusion. The attention one gives to the kilesas comes from delusion. If one isn’t deluded, one couldn’t care less about the
kilesas. Kilesas are just what they are. This doesn’t mean that one doesn’t have to relate to the world or society or use language in order to speak. One still has to relate to others. But one doesn’t let dangers and drawbacks arise, since one’s whole attitude isn’t one that would allow anger to come up.

There is no anger, just like water that doesn’t have any dirty particles in it. The water is free from dirty particles until we agitate it by mixing something in to make it muddy. Even though we may be challenged or provoked, we don’t feel stirred up, since the water of our heart is clear. There aren’t any particles of dirt inside us which could be agitated. We keep the goodness of our heart. Praise can’t provoke it, neither can criticism. There is always the feeling of purity in it. That this purity exists, we can only know individually by ourselves.

We sometimes wonder and ask ourselves where this purity actually comes from. Well, purity comes from impurity. This is exactly where it comes from, just like peacefulness comes from agitation and happiness comes from suffering. If there is suffering, then there must also be happiness. Darkness can only come to be because there is brightness. Brightness can arise because of darkness. This is the way we see it.

Seeing things in this way, we live our lives with knowledge and awareness, with a feeling of being ready and prepared, possessing perfection in a pure way, free from provocation.

Unluckily for most of us, what can easily arise is the feeling that we are still at a stage where we haven’t yet established these new qualities. Well, if they aren’t habitually there yet, we can
make them become habitual. It’s not that this is something difficult, it’s not much of a problem to get a foundation in order to get started.

For example in relating to social problems around us, we cultivate an attitude that is tolerant, or at least we maintain an attitude of relinquishment (caga) and generosity (dana). Maintaining generosity, giving and tolerance supports our mindfulness, since whenever discontent arises, we think: “Well, living together has just got to be this way!” You can compare it to my tongue here. It’s normal that it sometimes gets bit by the teeth. We just admit that being together sometimes doesn’t go so smoothly.

Of course there are always conflicts in life. But we know how to forgive, we know how to give up, we know how to open up and invite constructive criticism from others. When we live together in a community, we have to find ways of expressing ourselves to others, so that our living together leads to peacefulness and goes in the direction of harmony. We call this pavarana⁴¹. Pavarana means to give those with whom we live together the chance to criticize us, granting them the freedom of speech, as we say in modern terms. This provides the ability to open oneself up. It also involves the ability to listen in an open way, to accept the opinions and feelings of other people. Whether their views are right or wrong, we can always see them as something to learn from. If we can contribute this openness of pavarana to our living together, we won’t have anything that stimulates self-importance or holding on tightly to ourselves. When we have these qualities it is possible

⁴¹ pavarana (Pali): literally means “invitation”, i.e. the invitation to admonishment by other bhikkhus in this case.
to go one’s own way and nevertheless create a community feeling of living together in peace and happiness.

When we live in society and with the objects of the world around us, of course there is unevenness. There is unevenness, but we can still live together in harmony. Because of this unevenness we have to live with the attitude of not taking anything as being certain. We have to live in accordance with the underlying principles of reality. We live in uncertainty but we create a feeling of certainty. There is change (aniccam), but in this there is stability (niccam). There is suffering, but there is non-suffering in there as well. We have a feeling of not-self (anatta), but right in there we have a feeling of self (atta). The deathless (amata), the Dhamma that doesn’t die, lies right here as well. When we start to look at impermanence (aniccam), viewing it with maturity and perfection, we will see permanence (niccam) coming up as a reality. This is similar to contemplating our mental proliferations, the sankharas. If we see things from the perspective of maturity and perfection, the visankharas42 are actually right where the sankharas are. It is like death and the deathless being both in the same place.

This is the way we contemplate things. Seeing things from this perspective, the feeling of peacefulness will arise. There will be stillness. Total peace in all aspects – peace from all sensual pleasures, peace from wanting, peace from all mind states, peace from praise, peace from blame, peace from happiness and suffering.

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42 visankhara (Pali): the unconditioned, the unconstructed, where there are no proliferations.
We sometimes wonder where purity actually comes from. Purity comes from impurity, just like peacefulness comes from agitation and happiness comes from suffering. Brightness can arise because of darkness.
So, if we experience both sukha and dukkha in our practice, this is not a problem. We just need to try and not be negligent. There will always be a bit of sukha here and a bit of dukkha there. This is what I experienced. Thinking about myself, when I was new to the principles of the life in the yellow robes, I didn’t know anything. I didn’t come with the expectation to take on this lifestyle for all my life, either. I thought I would ordain merely to follow the tradition of young men in Thailand to ordain temporarily at least once in their life. I came to have a look, because people say that it’s good to try becoming a monk. But even after I had tested the monk’s life and decided to stay, I kept drifting back towards my old ways of living in many situations. Actually I was still a layperson, although now I was part of the class of monastics. Living under the shade of the yellow robe, I had become an object of reverence for ordinary people, but I still had the thoughts of a layperson, and everything kept being influenced by this. I still had dirty thoughts – but at least they were only thoughts.

There are these thoughts and feelings, and one can’t just say, “stop” and erase them all at once. It takes four or five years until one acquires new habits. Until then, one needs to live with dust in one’s eyes, always craving under the power of sensual desires. The eyes seeing a form is sensual desire, the ear hearing a sound, the nose smelling an odour, the tongue tasting a flavour – all these are sensual desires. It feels like one is clouded by the impingements of sensuality, and there is nothing that could clear up or lighten the situation. But, I thought, one has to try anyway. When others bowed to me or paid respects, I didn’t pretend that there was anything especially good about me. Rather, I felt that I lacked the merit to be able to pay people back for all their
goodness towards me. With such thoughts spinning around in my head, I actually felt quite depressed. There was nothing I had as a reward to return people’s kindness. How people treated me was kind in every way. I kept worrying, is there any good in me? Why is it that I have all these low and coarse thoughts?

Now, I think, this is absolutely normal. I would say that it is normal to be in a weak and unconducive state. But one needs to find skilful means in order to help oneself out of this situation. One needs to take the practices the Buddha recommended and apply them.

Sometimes, I would take up death as a reflection and use mental images of corpses for practice. Or I would go to very lonesome places which were secluded, silent and still, where there was no one around to be a friend. Then the thought of death would come up, since there were dangerous animals around. Thinking that something might harm us takes away the desire to sleep, because we always need to watch out for dangers. To be frightened is very good, all you can do is sit and observe it. Observe how the body heats up and breaks out in sweat. These are experiences of the *sankharas* arising and building up the illusion of a certain feeling. We face them using patient endurance. We don’t need to give way to them. Actually, they aren’t much of an enemy for us. *Sankharas* delude us because we are in an unfamiliar situation which we aren’t used to. Experiences like this are simply aspects of the unknown, so we need to try to understand them over and over again. For understanding a phenomenon it doesn’t make sense to wish it away. If these experiences go, they go. If they come, they come. We see these experiences as particular states of our existence that have to be
just the way they are. All living beings have to face death and fear death. There is no way around these experiences. We accept them as something natural for beings living in this world.

What I tried more than anything else, was to handle those feelings that arise as obstacles in our practice. Feelings like these arise from all kinds of desires and defilements, which are stimulated by sense contact when we need to relate to society and the world around us. Of course it is normal that, with all our weak spots, we are still prone to experiencing these impingements as obstacles. Normal or not, there is still nothing as difficult to handle than our interest in and desire for the opposite sex. Don’t think that I didn’t have this problem. Of course I did, with all its implications. But I tried to look at it, asking, “Hmm…, what’s the reason for my desire?” We can see sexuality as a biological fact for all living beings. Even though it is a natural instinct, this doesn’t excuse us from having to look for skilful ways of dealing with it. Could we make our feelings in this area change? We might think, “No, that’s completely beyond our capabilities.” But that still doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be careful and train to deal with these feelings of desire.

Sometimes when we suddenly get into contact with desire, we are completely taken by surprise that strong feelings such as these are possible. In a situation like this we are taken aback by worldly feelings dominating us. We need to take hold of these feelings and relate to them in a new way. We can change our perception by turning it towards reflections about the unbeautiful, non-self-sufficient, non-durable nature of things, or the very fact that there is not a personality or a self in them at all. You can bring the images of dead bodies to mind in order to counter the perception
of the body as attractive and beautiful. Reflect on these images, but don’t expect sexual desire to vanish completely. It might change to the point where you can breathe again! This is just like when you come up and take a deep breath after having been under water for quite some time. When you can breathe, your strength comes back to you again.

So reflections on death can reduce sexual desire and the delight in romantic objects, but it won’t make desire disappear completely since the seeds for it are still in us. This practice is strengthening, so don’t give up. Don’t forget to build up a solid foundation and try to sustain awareness and focus of mind as a steady basis. We focus our awareness continually. Sometimes we may feel ashamed, but there are also times when we feel pleased. So we just take the experience of feeling ashamed as an object of our awareness.

Eventually we will be able to sustain our minds in being aware steadily. Equipped with sati and sampajañña, we focus on the body and its conditioned nature. We can bring up the image of our own corpse in our mind and focus on it. Staying in the experience of the present moment, what is called the paccuppanna-dhamma will grow in our mind. The mind won’t go astray into the past and future. It won’t pay attention to things that are already gone or yet to come. It won’t worry whether a situation is going to be like this or like that. All that remains is the present moment. When we are fully present, our mind is like a flame when the wind is stilled. The flame is unmoved and upright in itself and light blazes into all directions.
It doesn’t matter whether we have our eyes closed or open, or what our particular posture is – we always have the feeling that we are a refuge unto ourselves. Still, an experience like this may not always be good – it still has its negative sides. In my case, I took it as an experience that comes entirely by itself. I hadn’t tried to force it to arise. It all came by itself. The experience that arose was similar to what is called obhasa, a bright light or clear radiance, which is considered to be one of the vipassanupakilesas\(^{43}\). What arose was a bright radiance and happiness in myself. But it wasn’t the case at all that I got deluded or carried away with it. This happiness was simply there by itself, even when resting or sleeping. What it is, and when it comes, one doesn’t know. There is simply the experience of it, an experience of uninterrupted wakefulness that sustains itself all through the day and night. Even when the body sleeps, it rests in this happiness. All this comes by itself.

An experience of bliss like this can last for a period of one or two days, and then it may change again. There is nothing unusual about this. Things simply change. The happiness in this experience isn’t the usual happiness based on liking and disliking. It is the rapture and gladness that the Buddha calls piti, an ongoing joy throughout the day and night, whether sleeping or awake. There is nothing to compare with this happiness. If we have such an experience of piti, we need to establish the awareness in ourselves that, having arisen, an experience like this will also be subject to change, and we need to uphold mindfulness and stay with this awareness of change.

\(^{43}\text{vipassanupakilesa (Pali): ten defilements or corruptions that hinder true insight, such as abundant feelings of energy, bliss etc.}\)
Over long periods of time, our experience will indeed change, maybe even to extreme, incomparable, heavy suffering. But we should sustain our mindfulness, saying, “Oh, this suffering is really suffering.” Thus we remain mindful of it. We watch and see, knowing that having arisen the suffering must also cease. Seeing suffering in this way is actually quite fun. We see it, “Suffering all day, suffering all night: Oooh…!” We want to cry, but there is no point in crying. We want to laugh, but there is no point in laughing. There is only suffering in its genuine form, taking its turn as a normal experience. And we observe it, knowing that having arisen, it will also have to cease again.

This is what we can feel when we really observe ourselves. After a while things will change again. Sometimes, after one or two days, our experience will go towards happiness again – happiness in the morning, happiness in the evening, walking, sitting, standing we experience happiness. We feel that our task is only to watch and follow this experience by knowing and seeing, keeping up mindfulness over long periods of time. Then, when we sense that we have been doing our task in practising this way long enough, we sit down in meditation. We sit and develop samadhi. We sit with mindfulness well established. All by ourselves, we keep sitting. And then, another change may take place: We experience peace, coolness and tranquillity. We aren’t concerned with our body, we experience a feeling of lightness of the body as if there was not a “me”, not a “self”. There is complete lightness. This is a refreshing and cooling experience. One feels peaceful and secluded. The sankharas are stilled, all the proliferations have ceased. The continuous changes of ups and downs, liking and disliking have disappeared.
This is not something that we have created by ourselves, it is where the practice takes us if we follow the natural course of our training. If you are determined to practice in a similar way, be aware that experiences like these can only arise specifically in the course of one’s individual practice.

If you want to follow this path, don’t follow it in a worldly way. This won’t be much good. Just like the Buddha warned his five first disciples not to take the path of worldly, unenlightened people, who follow merely their own moods. Don’t follow your moods. Be ahead of your moods. If something satisfies you, see it just as a state of mind. If something frustrates you, see it just as a state of mind. If you are pleased with something, it is simply one of the ways that pleasure manifests. Don’t give way to relating to these experiences in a deluded way.

We need to walk following in the footsteps of the Buddha in terms of knowing – knowing ourselves and knowing for ourselves, just as expressed in this little Thai saying:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Know how to } \\
\text{Look and figure it out } \\
\text{Try and speak it out } \\
\text{Go and carry it out}
\end{align*}
\]

So, today, as you have come to show your respect to me, I’d like to say that I don’t take these ceremonies as too important for me as a person, but they are still a nice expression of our relationship towards each other when we are living together. At
this time, I don’t have any more points of reflection for our journey together. May this be useful to your understanding in some way or another. Your listening is a chance for us to get in touch with each other – may we also work on our practice in the same way.

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Look and figure it out
Try and speak it out
Go and carry it out
agati-dhamma (Pali): biased views, ways of understanding and behaviour, wrong courses of perception. Arises out of desire, anger, fear and ignorance.

Ajahn Buddhadasa: A highly respected Thai monk who lived from 2449-2536 (1906-1993), and founded Suan Mokh monastery in Chaya province, Southern Thailand. Known throughout the world for his all-encompassing, contemporary, and highly accessible teachings.

akaraniyakicca (Pali): The four things never to be done by a Bhikkhu (sexual intercourse, stealing, killing and falsely claiming superhuman qualities).

anagarika (Pali): A homeless one; one who enters the holy life without formally entering the Sangha.

anusasana (Pali): Advice given to new Bhikkus as part of the ordination ceremony. Comprises the four akaraniyakicca and the four nissaya.

anatta (Pali): Non-self, not-self. One of the Three Characteristics

anicca (Pali): Impermanence.

arahant (Pali): One who has attained nibbana.

ariya (Pali): Literally: noble.

ariyapuggala (Pali): Literally: noble person; Noble Enlightened Being. A person who has reached one of the four stages of enlightenment.

ariya-sangha (Pali): Sangha in the highest sense: the group of Noble Enlightened Beings (ariyapuggalas).

ariyavamsa (Pali): Literally: the noble lineage – the lineage of enlightened beings; specifically defined by the Buddha as those who possess the qualities of contentment and fewness of wishes.

Bhikkhu (Pali): Literally: beggar; or one who sees the danger in samsara. Buddhist monk.

* For the sake of simplicity, in this edition all Pali-words are given in ordinary English spelling, omitting special diacritical signs.
bhojane mattaññuta *(Pali)*: Knowing the right amount in eating, or in consumption of other requisites.

dana *(Pali)*: The quality of generosity, and the act of giving.

deva *(Pali)*: Heavenly beings, angels, gods.

*Dhamma* *(Pali)*: (Sanskrit: Dharma) The ultimate truth of reality; the teachings about this truth; and the practice leading to its realization. Specifically refers to the Buddha’s teaching or doctrine.

*Dhamma-Vinaya* *(Pali)*: The name the Buddha gave to his own dispensation.

dukkha *(Pali)*: Suffering, unsatisfactoriness or stress. The central term in the *Four Noble Truths*.

dukkha vedana *(Pali)*: Unpleasant or painful feeling.

*Four Noble Truths* *(Pali)*: The first and central teaching of the Buddha about dukkha, its origin, cessation and the path leading towards its cessation. Complete understanding of the Four Noble Truths is equivalent to the attainment of nibbana.

**Going Forth**: see pabbaja.

*khandha* *(Pali)*: The five aggregates, or basic constituents of life: *rupa* (form), *vedana* (feeling), *sañña* (perception or memory), *sankhara* (volitional formations), *viññana* (sense-consciousness).

*kilesa* *(Pali)*: Defilements, stains, afflictions or obscurations of the heart. Their various forms are traditionally summed up as greed, aversion and delusion.

*hiri* *(Pali)*: Sense of shame towards doing wrong; see ottappa.

**Holy Life** *(Pali: brahmacariya)*: Literally: the Brahma-conduct; a term for the monastic life that stresses the vow of celib.

**Jataka** *(Pali)*: A collection of stories about the Buddha's lives, that forms a part of the Buddhist canonical scriptures.

lokadhamma *(Pali)*: The eight Worldly Dhammas: praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, happiness and unhappiness. These can be divided into agreeable and disagreeable phenomena (iththarammana and anittharamana dhamma).

**Luang Por** *(Thai)*: Literally venerable grandfather; a respectful way of addressing senior monks that are very old.
magga-phala-nibbana (Pali): The path, fruition and full attainment of nibbana.

metta (Pali): Loving-kindness, goodwill, friendliness.

namadhamma (Pali): Mental phenomena as opposed to rupadhamma, the phenomena of the physical world.

nibbana (Pali): (Sanskrit: nirvana) The extinction or complete fading away of all defilements, the complete ending of suffering, the ultimate fulfilment of the Buddhist path.

nissaya (Pali): The four dependences on which a Bhikkhu’s life is founded (almsofood, robes made from cloth used to wrap corpses, dwelling at the foot of a tree, and fereminted urine as medicine).

nivarana (Pali): The five hindrances in meditation: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and agitation, doubt and uncertainty.

ottappa (Pali): Wholesome fear of wrong-doing; see hiri.

pabbajita (Pali): Literally: One Gone Gorth; a Samana; a contemplative; see pabbaja.

pabbaja (Pali): Ordination as a novice (Pali: Samanera). Going Forth from the household-life to the life of a Samana, a contemplative.

pansah (Thai) or vassa (Pali): The three lunar months of the rainy season. The Bhikkhus observe an annual “retreat” for this period, passing every dawn within the same monastery or residence.

pañña (Pali): Wisdom; discernment.

pariyatti-dhamma (Pali): The study of the scriptures.

patimokkha (Pali): The 227 major rules of the Vinaya, recited fortnightly by the Bhikkhus.

patimokkhasamvara (Pali): The practice of restraining one’s actions within the 227 rules of the Patimokkha.

patipatti-dhamma (Pali): Practicing according to the scriptures.

Right View (Pali: samma ditthi): The first of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, the path leading to nibbana. In the highest sense to have Right View means to understand the Four Noble Truths.

rupa (Pali): form.

rupadhamma (Pali): the physical world, as opposed to namadhamma.

saccadhamma (Pali): The truth of reality.
saddha (Pali): Confidence, faith or trust.
Sangha (Pali): The monastic community.
sankhara (Pali): Conditioned phenomena of the mind; proliferations of the mind; (occasionally) all conditioned phenomena.
samadhi (Pali): Concentration. The development of sustained, blissful, unified, one-pointed awareness on a meditation object, leading to tranquility.
samaggi (Pali): Harmony, unity.
samana (Pali): Peaceful one, contemplative, renunciant, ascetic, recluse.
Samanera (Pali): Novice.
sampajañña (Pali): All-around awareness and clear comprehension. The Thai usage as “roo dtua” also means consciousness.
samsara (Pali): The round of birth and death.
sati (Pali): Mindfulness and recollection.
sati-pañña (Pali): Mindfulness and wisdom.
sīla (Pali): Moral conduct, ethical behaviour.
sukha vedana (Pali): Pleasant feeling.
tanha (Pali): Craving or desire, sometimes translated as wanting.
Three Characteristics: anicca, dukkha, anatta.
Triple Gem: Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha.
upadana (Pali): The tendency to hold on to things, such as thoughts that something is one’s own or belongs to one.
upajjhaya (Pali): Ordination preceptor.
upasampada (Pali): Ordination as a Bhikkhu.
upekkha (Pali): Equanimity.
vedana (Pali): Feeling. Either sukhā-, dukkha-, or upekkha-vedana
vinaya (Pali): Training and discipline undertaken by the Buddhist practitioner; or, the Bhikkhus’ discipline with its 227 major rules.
viññāna (Pali): Sense consciousness.
Worldly Dhammas: see lokadhamma.
About Luang Por Liem

Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo is a Buddhist monk in the Thai Forest Tradition. He was born in Sri Saket Province in the Northeast of Thailand on the 5th of November 1941. After higher ordination at twenty years of age, Luang Por practiced in several village monasteries throughout the Northeast until he joined the Forest Tradition in 1969. He took up the training under Luang Por Chah, who later became one of the most famous monks in the country, and whose reputation and influence has continued to spread throughout the world, even today. Living under Luang Por Chah’s guidance in Wat Nong Pah Pong in Ubon Province, Luang Por Liem soon became one of his closest disciples. After Luang Por Chah became severely ill in 1982, he entrusted Luang Por Liem to lead the monastery. Shortly thereafter, as Luang Por Chah’s illness prevented him from speaking, the Sangha of Wat Nong Pah Pong appointed Luang Por Liem to take over the abbotship. He fulfils this duty up to the present day, keeping the heritage of Luang Por Chah’s Dhamma and characteristic ways of monastic training available for monks, nuns and lay disciples.

Luang Por Liem has twice been given an honorary monastic title by His Majesty the King of Thailand. He is presently known as Tan Chao Khun Phra Rachabhananavigrom. For the Sangha at Wat Pah Nanachat (Luang Por Chah’s International Forest Monastery for training monks using English as the language of instruction) Luang Por Liem is not only a dearly respected teacher and guide in the monastic life, but has for the last sixteen years also conducted every monastic ordination ceremony as the preceptor.