



Ajahn Jayasaro:

'The Real Practice'

*(Three talks to the monastic
community of Wat Pah Nanachat)*

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1) Giving Yourself up to Things

*Dhamma-Talk to the monks of Wat Pah Nanachat,
Nov. 12th, 2551 (2008).*

2) *Khanti* – Patient Endurance

*Dhamma-Talk to the monks of Wat Pah Nanachat,
Aug. 27th, 2551(2008).*

3) The Real Practice

*Dhamma-Talk given at the ‘Change of Abbot-Meeting’, Wat Pah Nanachat,
Nov 25th, 2550 (2007).*

1. Giving Yourself up to Things

Like many of you I would imagine I understood that becoming a monk would mean, in effect, becoming a professional meditator. I believed that I would be able to spend many hours every day meditating, without having to make any compromises with the world around me, and without the pressures of having to support myself financially. But when I came to Wat Nong Pah Pong, I discovered a whole dimension of monastic life that I hadn't really conceived of before. Although I'd spent some time with the Sangha in England, as a *pa-kow*¹ it was really coming here into the heart of a Buddhist culture that allowed me to see the richness of the lifestyle, a way of life that had an unexpected beauty and nobility to it.

I spent my adolescence in a small town of some 15,000 people in the east of England. It was a very provincial environment in which I often felt the odd one out and developed a strong desire to find a peer group, a group of people that I could identify with and associate with. The group that seemed most in line with my ideas, my values and my personality seemed to be that of the hippies, or the freaks as they sometimes called themselves. And so my interest in Buddhism, eastern thought, Yoga, and my fascination and pull towards the hippy movement all led me on the overland trail to India. It didn't take me long to become disillusioned with my chosen peer group. I think the last straw occurred as I was sitting in a little cafe on a beach in Goa a month or so after my arrival in India. A French guy walked into the restaurant. He

¹ *pa-kow*: Thai word for *anagarika* (homeless one), i.e. a white robed practitioner training in the eight precepts, mostly as preparation for becoming a monk.

was a ‘costume hippy’, complete with very long hair and hennaed eyes, and a white waist coat, a short dhoti, and a large string of beads around his neck. He held a knobbly walking stick, and he carried with him a carved chillum from Karnataka and hashish from Manali. He had the whole thing down perfectly. He looked rather like I wanted to look. He sat down on the other side of the restaurant and after some time I remember him, obviously irritated, shouting at the little boy who was running from table to table, rushed off his feet, ‘Hey baba, I ordered my chips twenty minutes ago! Where are they!’

It occurred to me at that moment, I’m not seeing anything different here than I’ve seen anywhere else, in any other group of people. Different clothes, same mindset. I became even more of a loner, and gave up on the peer group idea.

So initially in Oakenholt, and especially at Wat Nong Pah Pong I was surprised to discover the peer group that I had been looking for. The feeling arose that: Yes, this is a group of people, this is a form, this is a structure, this is a way of life that I want to be part of. Here is a kind of community that will bring out the best in me, and one in which I can very easily see myself spending the rest of my life.

I immediately stopped looking at entrance into monastic life as simply taking advantage of an excellent vehicle for personal growth, and saw it much more as an opportunity to surrender myself to a form that I found truly uplifting. I can remember so vividly the first time that I put on my robe as a novice, the first time I went on alms round – these are memories of an incredible sense of pride and achievement. It felt so good simply to be part of all this. I can remember thinking that whatever would happens in my life in future,

good or bad, nobody could take this away from me. I'd worn this robe at least once. Even if I was to have a heart attack on my way to the village or be bitten by a poisonous snake or fall into an elephant trap or whatever, my life hadn't been in vain. Just getting this far was a wonderful achievement. I felt the most intense sense of good fortune. And that feeling has never left me. It might not always be so strong, it waxes and wanes, but it's always there in the background of my mind. And for me it's such an inspiring reflection that I'm wearing robes that don't differ significantly from the robes worn by the Buddha himself, by Venerable Sariputta, by Venerable Moggallana and all the great disciples. And the way which all of us live our lives does not depart significantly from the way that Buddhist monks have lived for the past two thousand years. Yes, there are modern developments, and in certain ways life is more comfortable and convenient these days, but in the essentials there is a very strong sense of connection and lineage.

The reason why this sense of lineage is so strong is, I think, more than anything else founded on our devotion to the *Vinaya*². It is the *Vinaya* which distinguishes this community and monastic communities of this tradition from the lay world and from communities of lay meditators. Giving ourselves up to the *Vinaya*, devoting ourselves to this life, we tap into the incredible *parami*³ that has been accumulated by Buddhist monastics since the time of the Buddha. And living the

² *Vinaya*: discipline; the Buddhist monastic code, the monk's rules.

³ *parami*: the spiritual potential accumulated through practicing specifically the ten perfections that the Bodhisatta achieved on his path to Buddhahood: *dana* (generosity, giving), *sila* (morality, virtuous conduct), *nekkhamma*, (renunciation), *pañña* (wisdom), *viriyā* (energy, effort), *khanti* (patient endurance), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhitthana* (resolution, determination), *metta* (loving friendliness), *upekkha* (equanimity).

monastic life is not just a matter of a number of individuals wearing yellow robes and applying themselves to the development of *sila*, *samadhi* and *pañña* (morality, meditation and wisdom) in the same physical space. As Sangha, we're more than the sum of our parts. At least we *can* be more than the sum of our parts, and I think that's an important ideal in monastic communities – to try to bring about that kind of situation where we feel that something bigger is happening here than simply us coming together as individuals with our imperfections, with our faults, our weaknesses, our strong points and our blind spots. Being together in this through the sincerity of our effort we are creating something marvellous. It may not seem that way on a daily basis – and there can be many disappointments and difficulties, that's true – but I think, whenever we step back a little from what we're doing in this monastery here – perhaps through spending time with laypeople or visiting monasteries in which the standard of Vinaya is not so high – we can really see the value of the form that we have inherited from Ajahn Chah.

Remember that the way we do things here is not just something that we've come up with ourselves; we conduct ourselves and follow practices which were taught, encouraged and modelled by Ajahn Chah. I have a very strong faith that Ajahn Chah was an *arahant*⁴ and to me, that gives many of the *korwats*⁵ and the minor rules he emphasized a weight and a significance that perhaps they might not have otherwise. Sure, some of the observances and some of the minor Vinaya rules can, in isolation, seem eccentric; I remember one layman who came to visit saying parts of it seemed straight out of Monty

⁴ *arahant*: the final stage of the four attainments of liberation or enlightenment.

⁵ *korwats*: the regulations, etiquettes and routines of a specific monastery.

Python – and you can see what he means. But taking on the whole package, with that faith in our teachers and the tradition and the sense that we grow through that, you start to see some long-term results.

I've seen so many times over the years how a special kind of dignity and integrity and composure gradually blooms in monks who give themselves up to this training. And it's been built up brick by brick out of very small things. Each observance, as I say, looked at in isolation may not seem particularly important; it may seem a distraction from the so called 'real practice'. But the Buddha made very clear that these teachings are just *one* training, which is to say that every section of the path bears within it the other sections. During the practice of *sila*, the practice of *samadhi* and *pañña* is implied or is necessarily present, if in a subordinate role. Similarly in *samadhi*, *sila* and *pañña* are present in a subordinate role and in *pañña*, *sila* and *samadhi* are present in the background. In the simile given by the Buddha himself *sila* and *pañña* are mutually cleansing just like two hands washing each other.

So our attitude to Vinaya and our relationship to it is integral, is at the heart of our life as monastics. Now some of us may have an instinctive feel for it, it may just come like, as they say, second nature. But for many others it may not be that way and it may seem strange, artificial and something which you just put up with: just part of what you encounter when you're here and you just go along with it basically as long as it doesn't interfere with what you really want to do too much. But I would suggest that that's not a helpful, creative, wholesome attitude, and thinking like that you will miss out on an awful lot. Much of the joy of this life is experienced through surrendering yourself to it in its entirety.

You can safely and profitably give yourself up to this life and this form for a number of good reasons. One of them is that the Vinaya applies equally to every member of the community. In Theravada Buddhism we don't have the idea that senior monks – even fully enlightened monks – are exempt from the Vinaya. I've been a monk for twenty nine rainy seasons now and I dress exactly the same way as someone who has been a monk for a single day or a week, and if someone sees me together with a newly ordained monk he wouldn't see the difference. The monk that is presently my *upatthak*⁶, is about the same age as me, and probably many people seeing us together might think that he was the senior monk and I was the *upatthak*. Looking at us externally, there are no clues. I don't wear a special hat or anything, and actually, his torch is much nicer than mine... The things that you see don't give any indication. In the Vinaya we're the same. Even great monks such as Ajahn Chah keep all the rules. Why do they do that? Out of compassion for their disciples and for the benefit of later generations. They don't need to keep those rules – they don't have the defilements that need to be kept in check by them – but they do so as an example. If a monk overestimates his attainments and starts to tell himself or others, 'I don't really need to do this anymore', 'I don't really need this kind of restraint now', or, 'I don't see any real defilement arising when I don't keep this rule, so why should I keep it?' – he has to confront the example of all his teachers. Ajahn Mun, Ajahn Chah, all the great teachers who most definitely didn't need to keep those rules did so anyway. Unless you are deluded enough to think that you are superior to them, you have to

⁶ *upatthak*: a junior monk that helps a senior monk as his attendant or servant. He performs duties of a disciple towards the teacher, like washing his bowl, his feet, cleaning his dwelling, carrying his bags and looks after him in all kinds of ways.

accept the logic that ‘Yes, I should keep the rules out of respect for my teachers, out of respect for the Vinaya.’

Forest monks have the reputation of being “very strict” with the Vinaya. But I don’t see the way we live as a matter of strictness at all. I would compare us to obedient children. Nobody praises a child who does what his parents tell him to do, for being a very “strict” child, do they? It’s the norm, it’s how children are expected to be. Similarly, as bhikkhus, we look at the Buddha ultimately as a father and out of respect and devotion to him, we keep his Vinaya. Why wouldn’t we? At the end of his life, the Buddha said that he wouldn’t establish any particular monk as his successor, or Dhamma-heir, but that the Dhamma and the Vinaya teachings would take his place as the *sasada*⁷. This gives an indication of just how important the Vinaya is. The Buddha established it as one of the twin pillars of the Buddhist religion for future generations.

We have all entered the Sangha voluntarily, and surely that demonstrates a wish to commit ourselves to living within the boundaries of the Vinaya. If we wanted to live a more free and independent kind of Buddhist life, we wouldn’t need to adopt this form. But having voluntarily entered the Sangha, we surrender to it. We accept the form with humility. I am reminded of a lady who used to come to Wat Pah Nanachat regularly. She was a retired school mistress – the fire-breathing dragon type – and she could be very fierce. Sometimes you could see the self-righteousness blazing out of her. This woman had had a lot of pain and suffering in her life. On one occasion her son took temporary ordination in a monastery somewhere in Ubon. He was a very intelligent, well educated young man and his mother had invested all her worldly hopes in him. At

⁷ *sasada*: the leader of a religion

the end of the rainy season he didn't want to disrobe, and his mother was absolutely outraged: 'Come on, enough is enough. The Middle way! Three months is sufficient. Don't go over the top. You've got a bright future ahead of you' – that kind of attitude. But he wouldn't listen. So she ended up standing outside the abbot's hut, shouting and abusing him, screaming – I suspect as a deliberate ploy – knowing that it would create a major embarrassment for everyone involved. And her son, mortified, disrobed. After he disrobed, I don't think he ever talked with his mother again. He applied for a position overseas, moved to America, and I don't believe that she's seen him ever since. So anyway this woman had had a lot of pain in her life, much of which was self-inflicted. One of the first times she came here, after listening to a Dhamma talk, she was filled with a lot of *piti*⁸, and she bowed to me in a very slow, mannered self-conscious way, and she said, 'It's just so wonderful to be able to find a monk that I can bow to wholeheartedly.'

I had heard that kind of phrase before, and didn't much care for it. I said to her, 'Your bow must be very valuable, that you can only give it to some special monks. My bow is very cheap. I bow to anybody who has got more rainy seasons than me, anybody who was ordained even a day before me. I don't care who they are, I really like bowing.'

She wasn't used to being spoken to in that way, but she took it well and became a regular supporter of the monastery after that.

But the attitude that the woman showed when she came to bow, can be found amongst monks as well, 'I'll bow only to

⁸ *piti*: rapture and abundant joy

senior monks who I admire and do this service only for them. Who is this other monk anyway; who does he think *he* is.’

I’ve seen that kind of attitude in a number of places over the years. And where does it come from? It comes from thinking that my bow and my service, my offering is so valuable, that I’m only willing to give it to someone very special. Ask yourself whether that sort of thinking comes from the kind of mental state that you would like to cultivate within yourself.

When I was a young *pa-kow* and novice in Wat Nong Pah Pong we *upatthaked*⁹ any monk with five rainy seasons. In the early days everyone around here was so much more junior anyway. It’s hard for all of you to appreciate what five rainy seasons meant in those days. For one thing, there was this kind of superstition that once you reached five rainy seasons, you were safe, you were in for good, you weren’t going to disrobe. If you could just get through those first five years you’d be okay. And once you had five years, as a formal recognition, a triangular pillow was put at your seat. That was a big thing. I remember being the storeroom-keeper, getting out one of these pillows for a monk that I liked who had just completed his fifth rainy season. It made me so happy to be the one to honour him in this way. He was a very humble monk and as I put it out I remember looking forward to his reaction.

And then we had monks of five rainy seasons, of six rainy seasons and so on disrobing, so we started thinking, well maybe it takes a little bit longer... And then there was a monk

⁹ This is a monastery idiom frequently used in the Ajahn Chah Sangha. The Pali noun *upatthak* is made into the English verb *upatthaking* i.e. giving *upatthak*-service.

of eight rainy seasons, and then one of ten, and one of fifteen... Eventually you were forced to realize that you're never safe, unless, of course, you're safe in your mind. But anyway we novices and young monks did upatthak monks of five rainy seasons. Now, think of monks of five rainy seasons that you know and think of how uninspiring they can be sometimes. We just didn't think about it. This is what you did: when you are an *upatthak* you are not upatthaking for them, you are upatthaking for you. It's a really good thing to do, and it is part of your training. I remember upatthaking for one western Ajahn, and I just found him so uninspiring, but I thought, this is surely why Ajahn Chah wants me to do this, because of all that it was bringing up in my mind.

In the cold season following my first rainy season I was selected to be one of Ajahn Chah's attendants. We were sent to Pah Gut Wai, a little monastery down on the Moon River, where Ajahn Chah would go to rest during the cold season. I was blissed out. I had wanted to do this so much since I first arrived. There can be a lot of competition and jealousy around big teachers like Ajahn Chah. Everyone wanted to be close, and to get this opportunity to upatthak was wonderful. What made it especially meaningful was that being away from Wat Nong Pah Pong at a small monastery made the situation particularly relaxed and intimate. I was, as they say, living the dream. The abbot of this monastery was as different a kind of monk from Ajahn Chah, as might be imagined. He would probably have walked away with the prize for the most uninspiring senior monk in the whole Wat Nong Pah Pong empire (but to be frank, it sometimes felt like he had some stiff competition...). He was a *luang da*¹⁰, as he ordained in middle age after a long married life. He was originally from Thailand

¹⁰ *luang da*: a monk ordained in old age, who oftentimes still carries a few odd habits from his lay life with him.

but had spent some twenty years as a farmer in Laos. Ajahn Chah had given him this monastery to look after and really tried to give him some *gamlang jai*¹¹.

Upatthaking Ajahn Chah, in the morning, you'd go up to his room, and you'd compete for this job of emptying his spittoon. It was one of these big spittoons, and it was full – full of urine and betel nut juice and other bodily fluids. And everybody wanted to be the one who could empty this spittoon on the 'betel nut-bush' behind the meditation hall. I found this a great job. And one day I was walking to the meditation hall, and this car was out in front, and Ajahn Chah was putting on his robes, and the novice that had come along had his robes on already, so I thought: 'Oh, I've lost it. They're leaving. I've got to get my bowl and everything', and I was very embarrassed that I hadn't been on the ball, and so I said something like, 'Luang Por, krap, I need just two or three minutes to get my bowl.' But he said, 'You don't need to. You're staying here.'

And so from being in this classic kind of heaven-realm, living in a small monastery helping to serve Ajahn Chah, I suddenly found myself in what felt like a hell-like situation: there was just me and this monk who famous for the fact that no monk that I knew had ever been able to live with him for more than a month or two. Everybody had run away. He was notorious. And he spoke this really thick Lao, which was made even more incomprehensible by the betel nut that was always in his mouth. He was bad tempered and grumpy and miserable. But then I thought, well, I'm not going to suffer about this. I'm not going to make this worse than it is, and if Ajahn Chah left me here, I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt that he wants me to be here and to make something out of this. I'm

¹¹ *gamlang jai*: encouragement, friendly support

going to do it. And so I started. In the morning – same spittoon. I’d look at it: urine, betel nut juice, phlegm, and so on. But, it was really tough taking care of that, even though it was exactly the same stuff as in Ajahn Chah’s spittoon. It wasn’t as if Ajahn Chah’s urine had this wonderful kind of mystic smell to it – but still it was difficult. I forced myself.

In the evening I’d go to his *kuti*¹², massage him, make him cocoa, and listen to his rants and endless anecdotes about Laos which I couldn’t understand at all. I had just learned this Lao-word ‘*kah noi*’, and at every pause I’d say ‘*doy kah noi*’¹³, and he was really pleased. I was a captive audience... The other thing I remember is that he told me the whole story of Venerable Ratthapala from the Ratthapala-sutta¹⁴ in great detail. But because in Thai, “Ratthapala” is pronounced “ratthabahn” (government), I thought he was talking about politics. He was telling me the whole story mumbling the words “rattabahn, rattabahn”, and I thought, no, this is just really the pits, you know, expecting to be with Ajahn Chah and having to listen to this old monk talking about politics and the government. Well, I spent six months with him, so I got the record, and a great deal of respect from my fellow monks for doing this, and I feel I became quite good friends with that old monk, became fond of him in a way, and I don’t regret the time that I spent with him. I certainly learned about upatthaking and performing duties without discrimination.

One of the most important points to be made about the observances is their role in the practice of mindfulness. As

¹² *kuti*: a monk’s hut

¹³ *kah noi* and *doy kah noi*: very polite form for replying with ‘yes’, just as ‘krap’ in Thai.

¹⁴ One of the *suttas* (discourses) of the Buddha in the “Middle Length Sayings”

forest monks, we uphold the development of mindfulness in daily life, but how do we go about it, practically speaking? What are you mindful of? There is no kind of floating quality of mindfulness or awareness – mindfulness is always *of* something. So what are you mindful of? The basic answer to that question in our daily life as monastics is the Vinaya rules and the *korwat* observances. These are our ‘pegs for mindfulness’. Another analogy: visualize a radar screen and a moving object – a missile perhaps – moving across the screen. A radar operator is able to track the moving object easily and accurately by means of a grid. The object moves, say, from square A4 to B6, or whatever. Similarly, the Vinaya rules and the observances give you a grid in which you can constantly be returning to the present moment and keeping track of what you are doing with your body, how you are speaking, how you are acting. This is a meditation. It’s a mindfulness practice. All these things: how you put your shoulder bag down, how you fold your sitting cloth – there is an incredible number of observances that we keep. If you look at it in one way, it’s “so much stuff to learn” and it’s “such a hassle”, and it can feel like people are always getting on your back because you’re not doing things the right way. And then you change the way you’re doing it, and then someone else tells you off because you’re not doing it the way that you’ve just stopped doing it. Then it turns out the person who has admonished you had trained in another monastery and had been taught something else, and so on and so on, until maybe you just want to bellow in frustration. But if you can be patient, approach the Vinaya in the right way and consciously try to develop a wise attitude towards it, then you will gradually learn how to use these training rules as tools for awareness. Then you will find that keeping them can sharpen and noticeably increase your mindfulness.

Faith plays an important role. In the *Visuddhimagga*¹⁵, some of the teachings, and some of the lists and categories in particular, seem to me rather contrived, but there are some that I find very useful. Going through the section on the four ‘*parisuddhisila*’, I particularly like Venerable Buddhagosa’s list of the particular virtues or *kusala dhammas*¹⁶ that you need to develop those four kinds of *sila*. What would you think – of all the *kusala dhammas* that are taught by the Buddha – which is the one, which is singled out as the most important in keeping the Vinaya? The answer is *saddha*, faith. Because the Vinaya is not something that you can prove in a certain way. It is something that you take on trust. You need the faith that living within this form, following the procedures and surrendering yourself to this is, in the long term, is preventing the arising or the growth of unwholesome dhammas and at the same time stimulating the creation and sustenance of many wholesome dhammas.

Another central plank of our development of *sila* is the practice of *samana-sañña*¹⁷, the recollection of ourselves as a *samana*. As bhikkhus, reflecting on our conventional identity as *samanas*, the implications and the responsibilities that it entails in this way, far from detracting from the investigation of *anicca, dukkha, anatta*¹⁸ actively supports it, by keeping us on track. There are certain ways that a *samana* acts, certain ways a *samana* speaks, which are not the ways laypeople act, are not

¹⁵ *Visuddhimagga*: A standard commentarial work in Pali written by Achariya Buddhagosa in Sri Lanka around a thousand years after the time of the Buddha

¹⁶ *kusala Dhammas*: wholesome qualities or factors

¹⁷ *samana-sañña*: the perception of yourself as a *samana* (monastic, renunciant, literally: a practitioner of peace)

¹⁸ *anicca, dukkha, anatta*: the principles of impermanence, suffering and non-self, as an expression of the highest insights into Dhamma

the ways that laypeople speak. We frequently recollect this. I'm not advocating a sense of arrogance here, saying that we're special, or, we're better than laypeople, but we are a small part of, a noble lineage of *samanas*. The support that we get from the lay community is one of the advantages of being recognized as a *samana*, but it also entails certain responsibilities, not least of which is keeping the Vinaya. We don't have a Sangha police force, (even if some monks go through a period when they can be rather officious about the training...), but the idea is rather that Vinaya has to come from within us. It is an 'honour system'. The *sila* that leads to *samadhi* has to come from our full consent. And it's through taking on these boundaries voluntarily and being able to live our lives and conduct ourselves within these boundaries consistently that that kind of self-respect, self-esteem, and sense of well being which are absolutely imperative for further development on the path, starts to manifest.

You may remember that when Ajahn Chah went to see Luang Puh Mun and told him how discouraged he felt by the huge number of minor rules and regulations laid out in the *Pubbasiccha*' Vinaya commentary Luang Puh Mun reminded him that, yes, all these things are there and to be learned, but that the crucial point is to have *hiri* and *otappa*¹⁹. Now, we all possess these qualities of *hiri* and *otappa* to a certain extent, but we can't take them for granted, they need to be cultivated. How do you do that? How do you cultivate *hiri otappa*? *Hiri* is the sense of shame. It arises through wise contemplation of conventional responsibilities, roles and positions. For instance you may reflect on your monkhood. What is appropriate conduct and what is inappropriate conduct for a monk? What is beautiful behaviour, what is unseemly? What is the correct and

¹⁹ *hiri*: a sense of moral shame; *otappa*: the fearful shying away from anything immoral

beautiful and appropriate conduct for a *samana*, for a leader of a community, for an elder, *majjhima*²⁰, or a new monk, for a novice, and so on. Now if you can clarify to yourself what is the right, the wise, the beautiful, and noble kind of behaviour, if you reflect on it a lot, and contemplate it, then, when you're about to act or speak in a way that conflicts with that, there is this sense of conflict, of inconsistency. What you're about to do is not consistent with what you believe to be right. It is in fact, to be blunt, a betrayal of your goals and aspirations and what you believe to be correct. The feeling that arises then is *hiri*, the sense of shame. Shame is not the same thing as guilt. There is no sense of being a bad person. Shame is simply the emotional counterpart to this recognition of inconsistency. Venerable Buddhaghosa explained it with a vivid simile. He said you feel the same way about an action as you would about excreting in the middle of a market place.

Otappa, fear, is not an emotion that arises from trying to persuade yourself that you're about to do something that is really bad or evil. This can easily become the classic kind of Puritan repression, where you feel twisted inside from being attracted to things you're supposed to reject. *Otappa* comes through intelligent reflection on the consequences of our actions. This starts from a basic level of: "If I do this, if I say this, and it's found out, (which in almost all the cases it is), how would that affect my standing in the community, how would it affect my relationship to the people that I love and respect and look up to, how will it affect my own sense of self respect, how will it affect my practice, my development of the path?"

So in reflecting on the consequences of the action – not the action itself – in very many different aspects, you're not

²⁰ *majjhima monk*: a "middle-aged" monk between five and ten years in the robes

trying to brainwash yourself that something is awful, when you don't yet see it that way. You may have to admit that the pleasurable feelings that arise from that kind of conduct are still attractive to you, but through seeing the consequences, they fade in significance. They just don't seem worth it. And so you wisely refrain. Gradually, over time, the need for wise reflection diminishes. *Hiri* and *otappa* arise spontaneously. This is why the Buddha called them the guardians, and why they provide the most important foundations for *sila* practice.

So these are some examples of dhammas that promote the development of *sila*. They become strong and prominent, they become refuges through reflection (*yoniso manasikara*), through knowing how to look at things, knowing how to look at Vinaya- and korwat-practice in the most constructive way, in the way that's going to have both beneficial short term and long term results for you in your monastic life. To quote Ajahn Chah, you care for your *sila* and your *sila* cares for you.

2. *Khanti* – Patient Endurance

One of my favourite very short stories is of a seeker of some kind, coming across a wise man (that in some versions it is a wise woman, is not important), and engaging him in conversation. At the end of their conversation the sage reveals from within a carefully folded piece of cloth a most incredible jewel. The young man, the young traveller or seeker, is absolutely dazzled by the jewel, and says, ‘Can I have this jewel? Would you give it to me? It would make so much difference to my life’.

And the old man says, ‘Sure’, and gives it to him.

The young man is very excited and afraid that the old wise man is going to change his mind, so he hastily says goodbye and sets off on his travels. But then an hour or two later the young man reappears, approaches the old sage with great humility and respect, lays the jewel down in front of him on the ground and says, ‘Excuse me, but I’d like to make a trade. I’d like to exchange this jewel.’

And the sage says, ‘What for?’

‘I would like to exchange this jewel for knowledge of how to gain the sort of mind that could give up a jewel like that without a second thought.’

I think, it’s the kind of awakening wisdom that we see in that young man’s mind, which has lead all of us towards the holy life. To see that jewels and worldly wealth and fame and fortune and comfort and relationships and so on and so forth are not worth (in the Pali idiom) ‘one sixteenth’ of the value of the kind of mind that can experience that deep and lasting contentment without them. I feel that it’s very important that we return again and again to refresh ourselves with the inspiration that led us to give up the worldly life in order to

follow this path. And to allow that to nourish our minds particularly in those times when we begin to feel a bit overburdened or as if we are not really getting anywhere in the holy life, or that things are not quite working out the way that we hoped that they would, or expected that they would. I agree with the teaching – and I know this wouldn't go down with lay Buddhists so well, that “it is better to be a miserable monk than a happy layperson.”

The reason is, because the misery of a monk is misery with an end. The misery is not inherent in the living of the holy life, but it is a phase or one part of the journey for most of us. Having such confidence in the process, in the overall journey and the goal and the value of sticking with it, is absolutely essential.

When I was first here in Northeast Thailand in late 1978, living at Wat Nong Pah Pong, I couldn't speak the language, of course. These days the monks that go to Wat Nong Pah Pong are blessed with patient and skilful translators. I didn't have that at all. I remember my first three hour Dhamma talk sitting *pappiap*²¹ (which is a weird awkward kind of posture when you're not used to it) and being absolutely fascinated by Ajahn Chah's gestures and his tone of voice, and what was obviously a deeply sincere effort to transmit the Dhamma to his listeners. So I asked a junior western monk who spoke quite good Thai to give me a summary of these three hours. And he said, 'Oh, just the same old stuff: talking about patient endurance.'

²¹ *pappiap*: A common semi-cross-legged posture in Thailand, with one leg pointing to the back and one folded in front of one.

In fact I had heard this word “*od ton, od ton*”²² before. It’s about the first Thai word that I learnt. The young monk’s dismissive summary said as much about his understanding and general level of faith as anything else, but as a summary of a three hour talk it wasn’t at all satisfying to me, as you can imagine (it did, however, have one positive effect: it made me particularly diligent in learning the Thai language). Nevertheless, it was true and as I learnt the language it became more and more obvious to me, that the vast majority of the teachings were not the so-called “high Dhamma”, but were firmly founded on the practise of the monastic observances. Ajahn Chah talked a lot about living together in harmony, being scrupulous with the Vinaya. When the profound Dhamma did come, there was a great sense of joy and enjoyment. You didn’t hear it so often that you took it for granted. But those monks who felt that the *real* Dhamma is the *high* Dhamma and that everything else is just padding and filler, which is not really worth it because it was “just about korwat” or just about patient endurance – they missed the boat. They didn’t catch on to what the teaching was about.

Patient endurance – “*khanti*”, in Pali, “*kwam od ton*” (or simply “*od ton*”) in Thai – is a singular kind of wholesome dhamma in that it holds no obvious or immediate charm. It’s not the kind of dhamma that inspires your heart to feel uplifted and enthusiastic, the moment you hear its name. But yet as we know from the *Ovada Patimokkha*²³, the Buddha gave central importance to this virtue. In the *Ovada Patimokkha*, *khanti* is

²² *kwam od ton* or simply *od ton* : Thai for patient endurance and bearing with things, or to be able to stand them.

²³ *Ovada Patimokkha*: A famous summary by the Buddha of his essential teachings, that contains the quote: *khanti paramam tapo tithikkha* (patient endurance is the highest practice burning up defilements).

called “the supreme incinerator of defilements”. So, if we were completely logical, rational beings (which we are not, obviously), we would be incredibly interested in this quality. Given that we have ordained with the intention to realize Nibbana, when the Buddha tells us as plainly as he possibly can, that the main causal factor for the realization of Nibbana is *khanti*, you would think that *khanti* would be a major plank of everybody’s Dhamma practice, the main strategy and the thing that one devoted the most time attention to developing. But that is rarely the case, is it? For instance, when we are asked, ‘Well, how was your *tudong*²⁴, or, ‘What was it like doing this kind of practice and that kind of practice’, we may answer, ‘Well, I didn’t get much out of it apart from a bit of *od ton*, a bit of *khanti*.’ It’s as if *khanti* is the consolation prize, what you comfort yourself with having developed when you don’t get what you really want from a particular practice.

That’s why I think that revising, looking again at the whole topic of patient endurance is very helpful, particularly as to this day with Luang Por Liem being such a fine and consistent disciple of Luang Por Chah that patient endurance still is the backbone of the training of Wat Nong Pah Pong. It always has been and always will be, I’m sure.

One point I would like to make right away is that the Dhamma-Vinaya is a vast and complex organic whole, and that we seriously misunderstand it when we start to abstract particular practices, particular dhammas, from the whole and look at them in isolation. The most obvious example of this, one which is quite famous in having given rise to a great deal of debate in Thailand, is ‘*santutthi*’ (*sandoht* in Thai), contentment. There was a period when monks were being

²⁴ *tudong*: Thai expression for walking and wandering through forests and wilderness areas, as a practice for forest monks

actively dissuaded from teaching contentment because it was considered by the authorities to be an obstacle to national development. The idea was that if people were content they would be very bad capitalists and the material progress of the country would suffer. This foolish idea arose from a laziness or unwillingness to look at the primary sources of the Buddha's teachings on the subject of contentment, the Buddha's discourses (*suttas*). Because when you look at the discourses, you find that wherever the word contentment arises, it's always coupled with a dhamma such as *viriya* (effort), or heedfulness and non-laziness. The Buddha always makes it very clear that contentment does not mean laziness and complacency. Quite the opposite. And then of course there is the quite startling dhamma of discontent, discontentment with regards to wholesome dhammas which have already been developed. The Buddha said that that particular quality was one of the most immediate causes of his enlightenment. So in looking at the texts we see a more complex picture: contentment is always to be seen in conjunction with other dhammas which stress effort and application, and it is also emphasized that it is in relationship to material things rather than wholesome mental states.

I am giving you this particular rather well known example of contentment to demonstrate how individual dhammas can be explained and defined point by point, but that is not enough. Regarding the whole structure of practice we have to be able to see what a particular dhamma does, what it's role is, what it's relationship to other dhammas is. If we compare it to the simile of the chariots, it's to ask, where does this dhamma begin, and where does it end.

With patient endurance, one of the important things to remember, of course, is that the wisdom faculty has a very

important role to play; it's not always the case that we should be patient, endure, put up with things. There are other dhammas and other criteria to bear in mind, too. You shouldn't just bear with lustful or aggressive thoughts. You need to deal with them immediately. Let me give another example, the case of physical pain arising in meditation. This is a common concern for practitioners and meditators: to what extent should you bear with physical pain, and when should you change posture. Should you just stick with the pain? My answer to this would be: it depends. What does it depend upon? Well, a number of factors. First of all, if you have some physical illness, or some problem with your knees for instance. In that case, sitting without moving might well make your condition worse. You might end up having to have an operation. Patiently enduring the pain would not be such a good idea. Another example would be in the case where you experience a lot of physical pain while sitting, almost as soon as you begin to meditate. Although there are benefits to just bearing with that pain as long as you can, the danger is that you begin to associate sitting meditation with physical pain. Sitting meditation comes to seem like an unpleasant activity, a sort of bitter medicine that you force yourself to do. In that case too much patient endurance can defeat its own purpose. You can lose all your zest for meditation.

The point I'd like to stress here is that progress and long term success in meditation, is very much dependent on the fact that you enjoy meditation, you love to meditate and that it's the most important thing in your life. That is not only possible for someone who can enter *jhana*²⁵ or someone with easy access to *piti* and *sukha*²⁶ in meditation. I am suggesting

²⁵ *jhana*: absolutely one-pointed and still states of meditation

²⁶ *sukha*: bliss and happiness

that you may develop a very positive regard towards meditation practice even if *samadhi*²⁷ is not yet so strong. Faith in the value of what you're doing, wise reflection can go a long way. But to be able to sustain this very positive attitude, you should not be sitting with pain too much. If meditation becomes associated in your mind with physical pain, then even if you can deal with it, the accompanying tension and worry can be depressing. A bias against meditation can grow. So, in summary, I would say that sometimes changing your posture can be part of a good overall strategy.

Yet , every now and again, bearing with physical pain is a good thing to do and there are some really important gains to be made from it. One is that if you are able to sit through pain to the extent that you come out of the tunnel on the other side of pain, you may experience a rush of *piti* and *sukha* which can propel the mind into deep meditation. That is a wonderful experience in itself. But it is also important on the level of *sañña* (memory). Proving to yourself that pain has an end, and doesn't, as might seem to be common sense, escalate until it reaches a completely intolerable level, is liberating. You now know for a fact that it is possible for pain to reach a crescendo and then quite miraculously fall away. If you have had that kind of experience in meditation, your whole relationship to physical pain shifts, and interestingly, in many cases, your relationship to the idea of death and your own mortality also shifts.

The experience of dealing with, bearing with and being patient with physical pain leads us to many insights into our whole relationship to life at large. We become aware to what extent there is an unconscious or semi-conscious tensing

²⁷ *samadhi*: still focus of mind, concentration

around unpleasant situations, and a fear of pain. It's sobering to realize how often the reasons that we give ourselves for turning away from things are rationalizations after the act. Often our decisions that are made are basically on the pain-pleasure polarity, we're simply moving away from pain and towards pleasure. This fear and anxiety about pain is in itself an important area of study, because fear of pain is bound up with fear of losing control. When you are in pain you are in a situation that you can't get away from, so more than anything else it exposes just how severely limited your resources in dealing with *dukkha*²⁸ are. The natural tendency of the unenlightened mind is to try to avoid that kind of situation altogether. The meditator is interested in going against the grain and looking into the way our mind works in every situation.

So to summarize, I would say, that there are occasions where it's not a good idea to bear with physical pain, if it's going to have long term physical consequences for example, or, if you are just getting really depressed with having to sit through pain every time you meditate. You want to be able to maintain a sense of buoyancy and interest and enjoyment of meditation. But having said that, bearing with a certain amount of physical pain in meditation – just a certain amount, not just changing posture immediately when you feel discomfort, bearing with it for a while before you change, even on this level, you are developing, vaccinating yourself, gradually developing an ability to be with the uncomfortable and the unpleasant, in an unruffled and natural kind of way which expands naturally into an ability to deal with the unpleasant in daily life.

²⁸ *dukkha*: suffering, unsatisfactoriness, stress

Physical pain is the grossest kind of discomfort, the most tormenting, but there are also valuable lessons to be learnt from bearing with mental and emotional pain. The reward or value of it is the enhanced ability to see through pain, proving to yourself that pain has an end. To see that one can come out of pain like emerging from a tunnel, affects your attitude to pain in general, and even to death. Most importantly, it helps us in our investigation of the nature of dukkha. The texts say that the reason why the characteristic of dukkha is not obvious, is concealed from us, is because of change of posture. Being still, being patient with the natural phenomena arising in the body and the mind means allowing for the appearance of dukkha. By doing so we can understand more clearly its all-pervading nature. On this level it's very clear that the constant small movements and adjustments that we make to our meditation posture are a reaction, a response to dukkha. I'm not saying that we shouldn't ever do this; that we never scratch an itch or never move when we feel uncomfortable, but whenever we do, we should recognize again and again, exactly why we are doing so: this is dukkha. Every time we move, or we see somebody else move, we can remind ourselves: this is dukkha; this is the manifestation of dukkha in the various postures of the five *khandas*²⁹ Wisdom can arise right here.

Now before going on to one or two other areas in which *khanti*, patience, is exercised, it might be a good idea to give a definition. What exactly is patience? One of the definitions that I like and use myself was given by Luang Por Sumedho. It is: "peaceful coexistence with the unpleasant". I think that this is a very skilful definition, in that it prevents us from looking at patience as just gritting our teeth and just bearing with something until the bell goes, or there is no longer a need. If

²⁹ *khandas*: the five impersonal factors that make up a being: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and sense consciousness.

that is the case, and there is a lack of acceptance and stillness around the unpleasant, then it doesn't really fulfil the characteristics of *khanti* – at least in its role of an incinerator of defilements. If your eyes are still on the clock, your ears on the bell, there is the sense of time and wanting to get away from something, but not doing it yet, trying to prevent oneself from doing what you really want for as long as possible. I don't think that that's really what *khanti* is all about. *Khanti* is more about being able to develop a way of dwelling with unpleasantness in a way that the mind feels normal and unruffled and at peace.

This is the paradox and the challenge: Can you be at peace with something which is agitating, which is annoying, which is calling out for you to be averse to it? If you can, the wonder of it is that suddenly you see that you just don't have to react to things. There is no hard and fast causal process here. In the physical world there are certain fixed laws. If you were to put your hand into a fire your hand would burn. If an *arahant* put his hand into a fire the *arahant's* hand would burn. Irrespective of the amount of wisdom and calm and the wholesome dhammas in your mind, this basic process will take place, completely uninterested and unaffected by any kind of training and education that you might undertake. But in the mental realm that's not the case at all. We can see that by simply looking at the fluctuations in our emotional reactions to things. There might be somebody or something which really "rubs us up the wrong way", something that irritates us quite out of all proportion to what might be reasonably expected to be the case. But our level of irritation and upset is not stable in the way the amount of burning of the skin would always be the same if you were to put that same hand into the flame for the same amount of time. Under all the same conditions you would expect the same amount of tissue damage to take place. But yet

with the mind, you can see fluctuations. Perhaps in the morning you're really in a good mood, you had a good meditation and you see somebody behaving in a certain way, or something happens and – yes – it doesn't really affect you. In the afternoon you are a little bit tired, you're a little bit fed up, something has gone wrong, you see the same thing and you have a much stronger reaction. The intensity of the reaction is not solely the function of the irritant. It is a dual production. One part – and it is the important part – is coming from within us. It's affected by our own mental state. This is our great opportunity.

So we try to develop that patience and patient endurance, that steadfastness, that groundedness of mind which is not jumping around with delight at things that we like, or pulling away and shrinking from, or flaring up with anger at things we don't like, having a sense of just being there, very calmly being present to our experience. Then we begin to see that there is nothing out there which can force a particular emotion to arise in our mind. At most we may be subject to a very compelling invitation. We can feel that someone is giving us a very strong invitation to be angry, or someone or something is giving us a very strong invitation to feel greedy or lustful, but it's not compulsion. This is where the opportunity for freedom becomes very apparent. We see that if we keep doing this work and we keep plugging away very patiently, very methodically, and calmly, our ability to not receive the invitation, to not react blindly to that impingement becomes stronger and stronger. And our sense of self reliance, the sense of being our own refuge, become more and more real.

Our meditation practice gains immeasurably from the intention to develop *khanti*. Without it insights don't take root. With it they do. So we learn to cherish this quality of *khanti*,

this steadfastness and willingness to be with the unpleasant without pushing it away, without rushing towards it, just being there with things, not giving too much importance to the emotional tone of the experience, but more the whole structure, the flow of experience. With pleasant and unpleasant experiences you can almost feel like one simile is: surfing the unpleasantness, rather than fighting against it. This is particularly in the case of unpleasant physical sensations.

So we are taking *khanti* as a spiritual ideal as something that we really want to develop in our practice, and seeing the value of *khanti* has significant results. In terms of the areas that we exercise this quality, I have spoken already about unpleasant physical sensation (*dukkha vedana*), and I've spoken a little bit about the reaction to external stimuli, and of course there is the dealing with mental states arising in the mind, irrespective of externally stimulating things that arise within meditation. Generally speaking, we need to have the ability to be solid, present and peacefully with things that are irritating, annoying, and unresolved and bitty. You know, often things are in an unformed state that we can't really work without yet and there is that very strong tendency to want to have an answer for things straight away. We want everything to be worked out, to be neat and tidy, and the ability just to leave something; to say, "Yes, I don't have the wisdom, the ability to come to any firm decision about this, I'm not quite able to deal with this effectively, I'll just leave it there for the time being." This is an aspect of *khanti* which I think is often overlooked.

You may remember the practice of Luang Por Sumedho, in his first year here at Wat Pah Nanachat. When this meditation hall was first built, there was no Ajahn's *kuti*. He lived in a little room at the back of the meditation hall. You

can imagine how little privacy he would have had. Anybody could just knock on this door, including any laypeople coming into the hall. So Luang Por Sumedho was living in that room, and it wasn't as extensive as it is now, and he had a project of making a bowl stand. Of course with the entrance into the rains retreat all kinds of projects, including ones like this were halted for three months. So he was determined to get his bowl stand completed before entering the rains, and he was getting more and more frustrated, and was making more and more mistakes because he was rushing, wanting to get it finished. He had just got to get this done. So he relates how he stopped, realised the state his mind was in, and made a deliberate determination to put the whole thing down – an eighty percent or whatever finished bowl stand – and what's more, to put it in full view by the side of his shrine, so that he could see it every day and be forced to develop the ability just to be with something which is not quite finished. I have always admired that as a practice. It may not be in one of the lists of the special ascetic practices (*dhutangas*), but it really is a tough one to do. When there's something that's not quite finished, that sense of unresolved business is annoying, isn't it? You want it over and done with, you want the tidiness and resolution, and everything be as it should be. It's important not to believe in that, but to see it as a defilement of mind, as something that leads you to be sloppy, take shortcuts and to be impatient and lacking in precision and care. It is the practice of *khanti* that can expose, illuminate this kind of movement of mind. Through not following this craving for 'closure' we see how it conditions dukkha.

Keep noticing that it is not that we're bad or that there is anything wrong with this tendency; it's completely normal and natural for the mind to shy away from the unpleasant and to move towards the pleasant. But as long as we're doing that,

we're stuck in the realm of *samsara*³⁰. The definition of "bhikkhu" which Luang Por Chah liked to quote and expound upon is that the bhikkhu is "one who sees the danger in *samsara*". He was not advocating we practice discursive meditation on the danger of birth into different realm, or a contemplation of Buddhist cosmology, as much as talking about *samsara* as we experience it moment by moment. In our daily practice, *samsara* as that simple conditioned and undiscerned movement towards the pleasant and movement away from the unpleasant. A bhikkhu is one who goes against the stream of that habit.

There is another beautiful traditional story about *khanti* that I'd like to relate. The story begins with a certain *arahant* who loved solitude and didn't fulfil certain obligations to the Sangha. He was, as I remember, living in a cave and refused to attend an important meeting. As a consequence, he was called before the elders and given a punishment. He was told that he should start going on almsround to the house of a certain brahmin who had wrong view, great anger against, and contempt for Buddhist monks. The monk asked, 'And how long shall I do this for?'

The elders said, 'Just keep doing it, just be patient.'

So every day the monk would go to this brahmin's house and stand in front of the house. When the brahmin saw this Buddhist monk he got very angry and shut up all the doors and windows and told all his family members under no circumstances should they ever give food to Buddhist monks and to this Buddhist monk in particular. So the monk stood there in front of the shut-up house for a reasonable length of time and then returned to the monastery. He went the second

³⁰ *samsara*: the round of repeated birth in different lives

day and it was the same. And the third day it was the same. But because he had been given this practice by the Sangha elders he was very patient and he kept going day after day after day. One year, two years, three years, four years, five years, six years. Then in the seventh year the old servant in the brahmin's house died and a new cook was hired. The brahmin said to her, 'There is a Buddhist monk who comes and stands outside the door every day. Don't whatever you do give him any food. We in this house have nothing to do with him.'

Early the next morning the brahmin set off on his business. The monk arrived in front of the house and stood there quietly as usual. The new cook peered out through a window slat, and felt very uncomfortable. She walked out and started to shout at the monk, 'Be off with you, you shiny headed fool!' and other such coarse words.

That day as the monk walked back to the monastery, who should he pass on the road but the brahmin. The brahmin noticed that the monk had a smile on his face, and he immediately started to worry that the new cook had gone against his wishes and given the monk something to eat. So he said to him, 'Hey you, monk, did you get anything at the house today?'

'Yes, I did.'

The brahmin was furious. As soon as he got home he called the new cook into see him. 'I thought I told you, you were not supposed to give anything at all to that monk. Why did you disobey me?'

'I didn't. I didn't do anything.'

'Well, so what happened? Did you just stay quietly behind the closed windows?'

'No, I did more than that. I went out and told him off.'

The brahmin got back on his horse and rode back the way he came until he caught up with the monk. ‘You lied. You told me that you got something in my house and you didn’t. You’re not only a stupid Buddhist monk, but you’re a lying Buddhist monk as well.’

He was very angry. The monk answered him calmly, ‘No, I didn’t lie. I have been on alms round to your house for seven years and received nothing at all. Today, for the first time I received something from its inhabitants: some words of abuse. It’s a start. While considering that I smiled.’

At these words, something shifted in the mind of the brahmin. He suddenly became inspired by the monk, as he reflected on how the monk had been patiently coming to his house every day for seven years without once being given any food for his daily meal, and now on being abused rather than getting angry, felt grateful. The Brahmin got down off his horse bows and asked for forgiveness. Then he said, ‘Venerable Sir, tomorrow, would you please accept food at my house?’

The brahmin went home and told his wife that tomorrow morning together with their seven-year old son, she should put food in the monk’s bowl. It became a daily practice. The young boy put food in the bowl every day, and filled with faith took ordination as a novice, became a monk, became an *arahant*, and became Venerable Nagasena, one of the pillars of Indian Buddhism.

It seems that the elders who gave the monk the punishment knew that a baby with great *parami* had been born to a hostile brahmin family, and this was their means of creating a connection between the child and the Sangha. This

monk was willing to do this practice out of faith, and faith is an important cause and condition for *khanti*.

Have you ever noticed in your mind, or asked yourself: why is it, that in certain areas of our life, our monastic life, or at certain times we can be incredibly patient, and we are able to deal with discomfort and things that we don't like, and at other times it is very difficult, and we are very unwilling to be patient. Have you looked at the causes and conditions why that should be? I suggest that one of the most important factors is: whether we see something as worthwhile, whether we perceive it as meaningful. As soon as you start thinking to yourself: 'Why bother, it's not going to make any difference in the long run', so why put yourself through this? The moment you have that "Really, what's the point" – kind of attitude, you lose all your endurance. But if you see the value of something very clearly, you can be quite remarkably patient. We can see this with parents and their children. There are incredible accounts of the endurance of mothers trying to protect the lives of their children. When there is something that is really meaningful to us, a really strong motivating force, we can bring up immense amounts of patience. But if your mind slips into unwholesome thinking, or *ayoniso manasikara* (unskilful thought), it can completely undermine our whole capacity for patient endurance.

Patient endurance is, in other words, not only conditioned by how tough you are, or how good your *samadhi* is or whatever, but by your ability to reflect on experience, the ability to think about things in an intelligent and useful way and to create a sense of purpose and meaning. And to invest faith and confidence in that process and in that goal is what will support and sustain *khanti*, patient endurance, more than anything else.

So these have been a few somewhat rambling thoughts and reflections on this subject of '*khanti* – Patient Endurance' that I would like to share with you this evening.

3. The Real Practice

It was quite a revelation to me that the vast majority of Ajahn Chah's Dhamma-talks were not about meditation, or *jhanas* and *ñanas*³¹ and how to be a *sotapanna*³² and what it is like to be an *arahant*. They were very much more down to earth. They were about things like *korwat* and *od ton*.

What those words mean: '*korwat*' means the monastic regulations, conventions, the guidelines how we live our lives together in a community. '*Od ton*' means patient endurance. Those were major themes in the way that Ajahn Chah set up his monastery and in the way that he taught his disciples. And they were founding principles on which Wat Pah Nanachat itself was established. In fact from the very beginning of Wat Pah Nanachat attitudes to that kind of training and that kind of emphasis have varied in their appreciation of the use of *korwat* as a means of training, or the relative importance of the use of *od ton* in spiritual development of patient endurance. And for all the western monks particularly this has very much been bound up with the question:

“What is practice really all about? What's the *real* practice?”

There have always been a number of monks that say, 'I don't want to stay at Nanachat. It's a good place when you start out, but it's not where you can do the *real* practice. The *real* practice is over there...., the real practice is in a cave in Chiang

³¹ *ñanas*: special knowledges

³² *sotapanna*: stream enterer, the first of four stages of enlightenment

Mai or whatever... The real practice is in this or that place... – not at Wat Nanachat.’

This has been a constant point of discussion over the years and, I think, often the very real benefits of training here have been overlooked or have been underestimated. We can often develop a hierarchy of wholesome qualities in our minds. We can be led to romanticize and idealize aspects of the life. Of course, formal practice should always form the heart of our life as forest monks, and states of deep meditation are certainly to be aspired to, but the problem that can arise is that we can downplay foundational virtues that, in the long run, are absolutely essential. Patient endurance is a good example. People say, ‘...well, I didn’t get anything from that at all, except for patient endurance.’ It’s like ‘I didn’t get anything really worthwhile, but anyway, I guess a bit of patience is better than nothing.’ The Buddha himself, on the other hand, taught that patient endurance is the supreme incinerator of defilements. This is a phrase that we perhaps don’t give as much importance to as we might.

Years ago when I was researching for *Upalamani*, the Thai biography of Ajahn Chah, I interviewed many monks, including, of course Luang Por Sumedho. He, as you know, was the first Western monk to train at Wat Nong Pah Pong and the first abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat. Discussing the training he had received, I clearly remember him saying that, essentially, it was that Ajahn Chah provided the most conducive environment for development. I remember that particularly because it’s not the kind of answer that you’d expect from a disciple of such a great teacher – emphasizing his ability to create the most conducive conditions, rather than saying things like: ‘Oh, once we were walking along on alms round and he said this and suddenly I looked at the world in a different way’, or: ‘One

time I did something and he turned around and smiled and said....’ – like in the books we read. It was much more the ongoing life as a bhikkhu over a number of years that he stressed, not so much these high-points or the special teachings or profound words of wisdom, but more his ability to create a system, a way for monks to live together which was of most benefit to them in the gradual reduction and elimination of the unwholesome dhammas, the development of wholesome dhammas, and the purification of mind.

In many ways living together as a community is not a comfortable experience. We used to say in the old days, ‘The catholic monks, they have hair-shirts and those things they tie around their legs that cut into them and cause them pain. We don’t have all that. For us, just living together as bhikkhus, has the same kind of effects.’ But the fact that it’s not comfortable is actually the point of it. After a long monastic career I’ve experienced many different types of training environments, and, as you know, the last few years I have been living in solitude. I think I have quite a good grasp of the contrasts and the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of living this life. As regards a more solitary style, or the kind of life that many of us might characterize as ‘the real kind of practice’, I can see that, yes, the continuity, the lack of demands upon ones time, the lack of tension, the lack of stress and conflict and so on, are very conducive in a way. But I also noticed that there are certain very important aspects of practice that are more difficult living alone and which can be developed much more easily in this kind of communal environment. For example: just yesterday, when the senior monks had a little meeting I made a certain statement. Another monk very skilfully said to me, ‘Well, no, that’s not right.’ So I adapted and reformulated my statement, and the monk smiled a bit and said, ‘Well, no, that’s not right either.’ He was definitely correct, and I was incorrect,

so I shut up. And then all of a sudden I thought, ‘Wow, this is what I’m missing: living alone these days I never have that experience when somebody tells me I’m wrong or somebody points it out when I make a mistake, when I’m looking at things in the wrong way or I’m lacking the necessary information or working from the wrong information. This is a clear benefit of living in a community of good friends.’

The kind of things which are difficult to see living alone in the forest are one’s own *ditthi* and *mana* – views and opinions, the conceit, the ideas about who you are. Whereas you may have quite a clear and subtle awareness of the arising and passing away of moods and thoughts in consciousness, *ditthi mana* are more subtle; they can provide the ground in which these are perceived. You might compare it with a painting: the *ditthi* and the *mana* are more like the canvas or the particular mode of expression – whether it’s an oil painting or a water-colour. They do not draw the eye in the same way as the particular forms that constitute the painting.

One of the major maturing factors of living in a community like this that is so mundane and obvious that we tend to overlook it, is the daily schedule. In many ways this is one of the most important teachers. This is what Ajahn Chah emphasized, and has been passed down in this monastery – through Luang Por Sumedho, Ajahn Pabhakaro, Ajahn Jagaro, Ajahn Pasanno, myself, and Ajahn Ñanadhammo. Look at your mind, look at your body, and see what comes up when you have a steady, stable kind of environment, where everyday is more or less the same. Repetition is not the same as monotony, because there are always subtle differences. What happens, when the bell goes at three in the morning? How do you feel about that? How easy is it to get up in the morning? How difficult? Is it the same every day, does it change? Why does it

change? What's the difference, what are the causes, what are the conditions? How does it feel, going to the meditation hall every morning? What is your attitude to morning chanting? Do you like it? Do you dislike it? Do you feel indifferent? Do you like it when some people lead the chanting? Do you not like it when other people lead the chanting? Do you like this chant? Do you like that chant? How do you feel about going on alms round? How do you feel about this route rather than that route? All these kinds of likes and dislikes are coming up and becoming very clear to you because you have a stable background of *korwat*. You're not just doing things the way you want to do them.

When you first have an opportunity to live alone, you think, 'Ah, this is what I want.' You can sit as long as you want, you can walk as long as you want. There are so many things you can do in the way you've always wanted to do them, and that feels good – no question about that. But that feeling of relaxation and enjoyment that you can do the things the way you want to do them, is not necessarily a wholesome thing in the long run. There's also a lot to be said for forfeiting that kind of control. Of course you have the control in the sense that you've volunteered to come here. Nobody forced you to enter this monastery, to take on the training. You committed yourself to it, you took dependence from the Ajahn, and that means it is like a contract. 'Okay, I signed up for this now. And I'm willing to give up a certain amount of my freedom out of confidence and faith that this is a training that will have a beneficial effect upon me.' And then, when we're in that safe environment, in which everyone's conduct is grounded in Vinaya, and where we all have that sense of spiritual friendship, and we're all following the same path towards the same goal, where we can feel that confidence that people are living within the boundaries of the Vinaya and no one is going

to hurt us and harm us – then we give ourselves up to the daily schedule. And we learn to look at what happens.

Some of the stuff that comes up in the daily life in the monastery may seem a little bit ridiculous. Tan Ajahn Pasanno gave the example of getting very irritated about someone who had spilled some water and doesn't wipe it off their seat. If you were to explain this to someone outside the monastery they would probably be surprised: 'I got so angry because someone did not wipe some water off a seat.' Or: 'Someone walks into the meditation hall and makes such a loud noise.' Or: 'Somebody else is always sneezing' ... I could go on – you know all those little tiny things that rub you up the wrong way. These kind of things are going on all the time and it's rare that the things that disturb us are major issues. Most of the time, they're so petty, you'd be embarrassed to tell anybody else about them. But, nevertheless, they are things that bring up emotions in your mind. In fact, the trigger itself is not the point, it's what it symbolizes to you.

Sometimes when someone takes something that you think you had a right to it, say another monk is greedy and takes nearly all the remaining sweets at the mealtime for example. Normally one part of you'd say, 'Don't be so stupid. It's a little thing.' But it's not the thing itself, is it? Doing without that particular sweet is not difficult as such. You may not even be that fond of it. No, what really rankles is the sense that "it shouldn't be like that, it's not right, it's not fair." Seeing a monk act in a selfish indulgent way can seem to shake the whole foundation of our life together as a monastic community.

Each of our experiences is filtered through a certain lens, a framework. This framing process lies for the most part

within the realm of *ditthi*. And in the early years of monastic life, what we were really concerned about more than anything else (apart from developing sense restraint, and skills in using the Vinaya and *korwat* to firmly ground ourselves in the present moment), is to straighten our *ditthi*; to create correct and beneficial frames. Even in a monastery there are so many things that can bring up unwholesome dhammas merely because of the frames through which we perceive them: frames conditioned by our expectations, fears and desires.

Ajahn Chah's teachings come back again and again to the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are the foundation of all of our practice. First noble truth: *dukkha*, suffering. Second Noble Truth: *samudaya*, the cause is craving. This tells us that the suffering we are experiencing in our daily life comes through wanting things and not getting them. Not liking people, not liking things, but for one reason or another, having to put up with them. Liking things, wanting things, and not being able to be with them. And this is the nitty-gritty of monastic life in a community. You look at a person next to you and perhaps you think, 'I became a monk to get away from people like that. I never thought I would meet someone like that here, let alone have to spend my life sitting next to them.' (Some of these monks can actually later become great friends, by the way. But that's another story...)

So this is what it's about: we can be looking at the five *khandas* for example, or developing the four foundations of mindfulness and so on, through conforming to the monastic schedule. And being given periodic reflections that enable us to develop some kind of perspective we are able to see all kind of stuff coming up in us, as simply that. Conditions arising and passing away.

I think it is very common for bhikkhus to develop blind spots in their practice, or even blind areas (of course I don't have any myself, or at least I've never seen any....) Those things become more and more imbedded and more and more difficult to get rid of to the extent that you shy away from community. This is why to spend a long period of training in community life before going on extended periods of meditation alone is a basic principle in our monastic life: passing a five year period of apprenticeship first (although within this there are always shorter periods of solitude, too). For example, it is in community life where you can sort out right speech. Obviously, you cannot develop right speech living alone. Well, you can talk with yourself – and I sometimes do – but that's not the best way. We all have to deal with the unwholesome speech habits we carry into monastic life. Some monks say, 'In Wat Nanachat there are so many people, so much interaction. It stirs me up. It's not peaceful.' That's a particular frame, a way of looking at things. But we can change that frame and consider that this monastery provides an excellent opportunity for developing right speech. Right speech is not a minor consideration. It's one factor of the Eightfold Path. It's one-eighth of the Eightfold Path.

There is conceit, there are views. Often – particularly here in Wat Pah Nanachat, less so in Thai monasteries – you get confronted when you come up with ridiculous things, or you act in obnoxious ways. Somebody takes you up on it. In Thai monasteries people usually just turn away. They just don't want any kind of hassle, but here you often get pulled up for it. This is why a lot of monks can become averse to this place.

There is a real value in the *korwat*-training that I saw very clearly through the period that I was running the monastery. I don't have the psychic powers to just sit and see

who is doing what in their *kuti* or who is practicing well and then give Dhamma talks where people say, ‘Wow, he can read my mind’ (I can’t do that, and – to tell you the truth – most abbots can’t...). But one of the ways we can as leaders of communities have a very good idea of who is going off the rails, who is going a little bit strange, is practice of the *korwat*. Who is coming out for morning chanting? Who misses almsround or comes out late for this and that? Who doesn’t sweep in the afternoons? All these things, these aspects of the daily schedule, are very clear indicators of where people’s minds are at.

This whole relationship between the inner and the outer is a very interesting one. *Sila* and the way we live together is something that is constantly modifying us and changing the way we look at ourselves, our self-image. So, a major task for us, particularly as young monks, is to try to develop *samana-sañña* (the perception of being a *samana*). I’ll give you a non-monastic example concerning this change of attitude that is quite interesting. An experiment was conducted in America in which they took some really big ugly signs, promoting road safety, knocked on people’s houses in suburbia and said, ‘We’d like to ask permission to put this in your front garden.’, knowing that it would obscure the houses, and look totally awful. Eighty percent of people in suburb number one said, ‘No way’. Then they went to suburb number two and sixty percent of the people said, ‘Yes, fine.’ What was the difference? Well, in suburb number two, three weeks previously, people had gone around people’s houses and given them a tiny little sign promoting road safety. Three inches by three inches saying, ‘Could you stick that on your front door?’ Most people had no objections. And that was just enough to change their perception of themselves. Now that they had made this very small commitment by having a little sign on their

front door, their sense of themselves had changed. Now they were people with a concern for road safety. So, three weeks later, when they were asked to put that big sign in their front garden, they had this sense that they should be consistent with this new idea of who they are. And so many people, sixty percent said yes to these big ugly signs. Now, the comparison with monastic life is this: to keep the Vinaya, to be restrained, to follow the *korwat* – these are not merely external things that have nothing to do with the real practice. They have a very subtle effect on our sense of who we are. The *samana-sañña*, things are contributing. In the famous simile of Suzuki Roshi, it is not like going out in the rainstorm and getting wet; it is like going out in the fog and you are gradually and gradually getting more wet. This is one of the ideas underlying this training.

I believe this training works and is effective, provided that you're able to look at it and clearly see its value, and give yourself to it. Wat Pah Nanachat, as you know, is not an isolated western or non-Thai enclave in the Thai monastic world. We're part of something much bigger; we're one branch of more than two hundred branches, we're part of a lineage with wonderful teachers. One of the greatest was here this morning, the *upajjhaya*³³ of many of you sitting here today, Luang Por Liem. And so, our understanding of what Wat Pah Nanachat-monks are, is not of being part of an isolated entity, but that we are part of the Ajahn Chah tradition. The training here is not one which is restricted to this one place; there are the branch monasteries Poo Jom Gom and Dtao Dum, and all the other branch monasteries where over a period of time you will have the opportunity to spend time in. You'll also have the opportunity to live away from the other Western monks in Thai

³³*upajjhaya*: the preceptor in the ordination ceremony

monasteries, where you can learn the language and the culture more easily. Wat Pah Nanachat is blessed with two of its own branches, Jom Gom and Dtao Dum, where we can live in more solitude. The vision is of a rounded training.

As regards living with a new young abbot, please bear in mind that even the greatest teachers are not always competent in every area. There is a case, quite recently, where one of the most respected of our teachers had a real problem with a ghost in this monastery. He wasn't able to deal with it and had to go to invite another monk who is an exorcist to come and help. Every monk has his strong points and his weak points. Nobody is completely brilliant in everything. The idea of living with a great enlightened teacher is very attractive to all of us, I think. And fortunately in our monastic life most of us will probably have that opportunity at some point, But it is not a shortcut to spiritual progress. Often around great teachers there is a lot of politics, a lot of jealousy, and monks who are close to great teachers can easily become heedless and conceited. So there are a whole bunch of different kinds of challenges. There is always something else to learn from monastic life. In whatever monastery we are living in, whoever we are training with, it is the attitude of humbleness and sincerity that counts.

I have spent many years in this monastery and I feel a great affection for it and an enduring sense of connection. I think that all of us previous abbots still feel a part of Wat Pah Nanachat and want very much to support it. So I encourage you all to live together as *kalyana-mittas* (good friends in the Dhamma), which means trying to help each other to overcome unwholesome dhammas and to develop wholesome dhammas. Every one of us here is in training and we are all learning about Buddha-Dhamma and developing slowly and gradually or even

rapidly. It looks to me as if the framework here is solid and the community has a lot of potential. I would like to wish Ajahn Kevali, the new abbot, every success in fulfilling his responsibilities. I wish you all the true happiness and inner freedom that can come from commitment to the Dhamma Vinaya.