

Dear Jane...

WISDOM FROM THE FOREST
FOR AN ENGLISH BUDDHIST



BHIKKHU PAÑÑĀVADÐHO AND JANE BROWNE



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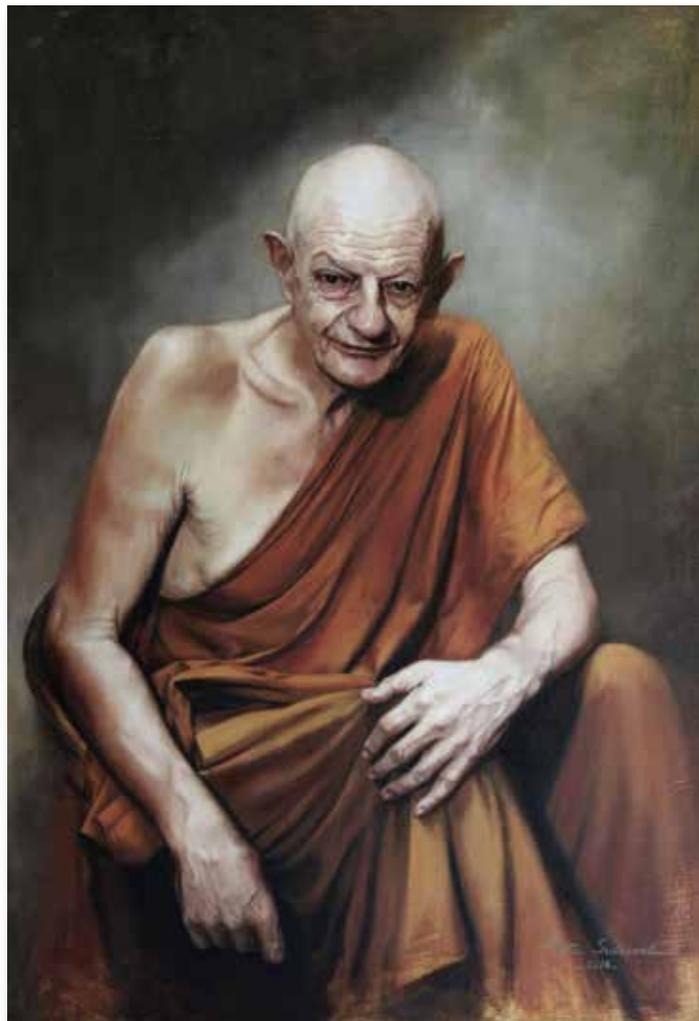
WISDOM FROM THE FOREST FOR AN ENGLISH BUDDHIST

BHIKKHU PAÑÑĀVAḌḌHO AND JANE BROWNE

Ācariya Mahā Boowa



Phra Prāyāvadīho



Jane and Jan





George Sharps at Wat Baan Tard

Freeda Wint at Wat Baan Tard





Jane and Freda Wint

Jane & George



Introduction



After leaving London, where for four years since 1956 he had been teaching the Buddha-Dhamma as a Buddhist monk, Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho arrived in Thailand seeking for a teacher himself. He chose, and was accepted by, Venerable Acharn Mahā Boowa, who was relatively unknown at that time. His monastery, Wat Pa Baan Taad, was in the north-eastern province of Udon Thani. In those days, it was an area scarcely developed where traveling was done on foot or by bullock cart. The Monastery grounds were partly forested, surrounded by paddy fields and connected to the village by a sandy track lined with tall trees. There was a plentiful supply of water provided from wells and huge rainwater tanks, but beyond that

there was little in the way of any other facility. Life in that region was sparse and comfortless and it was there that Jane, in company with her friend Freda Wint, took herself at a time when the notion of two educated and refined middle class ladies going on such an adventure would have been almost unthinkable.

When reading the letters it should be remembered that Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho, at the outset of his training under Venerable Acharn Mahā Boowa, was a beginner who had had little more than an intellectual grasp of the teachings of the Buddha. As the letters progress one becomes aware of Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho's growing insight and wisdom. Certainly the training which he was to undergo would have been demanding, gruelling and arduous for anyone. Venerable Acharn Mahā Boowa was a formidable presence, as I discovered for myself in my dealings with him. He was at once of a rather fierce demeanour whilst at the same time being very compassionate and kind. The care and attention Venerable Acharn Mahā Boowa took from the beginning, in his training of Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho, was as if he recognized in him the very qualities he could guide to the doors of the deathless, to enlightenment, to the final defeat of suffering.

In 2016, at the time of this writing, Jane is 90-years-old, bent over with osteoporosis and enduring constant pain as a result of a bad attack of shingles in earlier years;

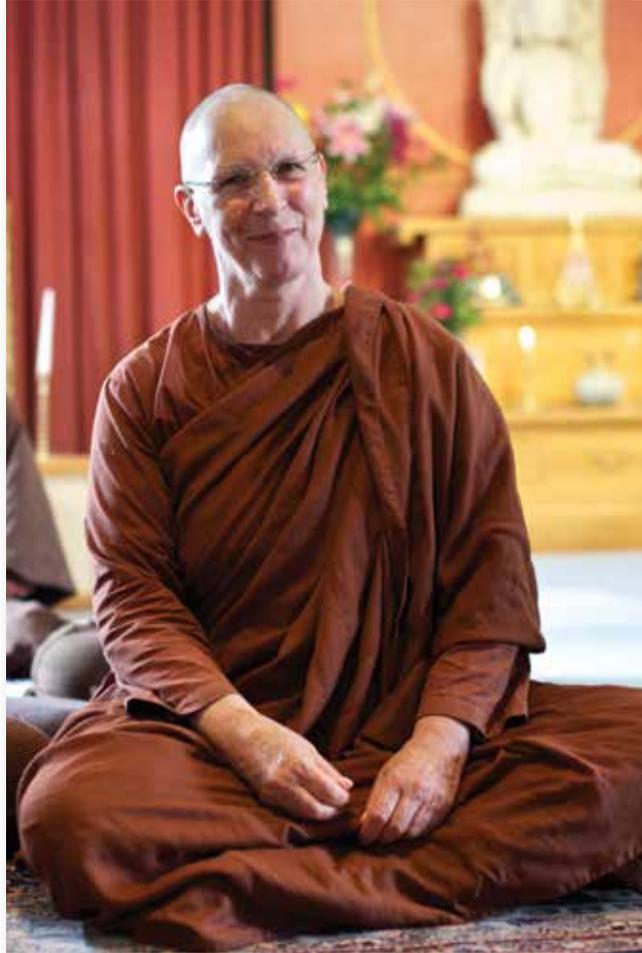
nonetheless, she has managed, over a period of time, to compile this work. She tells me it has been a great joy for her to revisit the most exciting and rewarding twenty years of her life. As self-examination is an integral part of the Buddha's path, I think that one should make allowances for Jane's apparent obsession with her own experiences both in the field of meditation and in her daily life. It is even possible that Acharn Mahā Boowa and Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho may have enjoyed the challenge of responding to Jane's multitude of problems, perhaps even learning something from it.

Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho was 78 when he died on August 18, 2004. He was cremated at Wat Pa Baan Taad and it was estimated that 50,000 people attended, including more than 4,000 monks. On that day, the sunlight and the atmosphere combined to make a full circle of colour in the sky around the sun. The rainbow first appeared as his casket was being taken to be placed on the funeral pyre; it appeared again later when his life story was read aloud, and a third time when Tan Acharn¹ Mahā Boowa lit the funeral pyre. This very rare phenomenon seemed, to many in attendance, to reflect the depth and subtlety of Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho's virtue, loving kindness and humility.



1. Tan Acharn translates as Venerable Ācariya, or Teacher.

Ajahn Sundara



Foreword



I met Jane in the early 1980s at Chithurst Monastery in England, where a germinal community of Acharn Chah's monks had taken residence under the guidance of Acharn Sumedho. In a nearby cottage four women, including myself, lived as part of the monastic community, keeping the Eight Precepts and training as *anagārikā*.

Later I got to know Jane's close friend Freda Newth Wint, whose story also appears in this book. Freda had spent some time with Jane in Thailand, at Wat Pa Baan Taad – the monastery of Venerable Acharn Mahā Boowa, in Udon Thani Province, Northeast Thailand. In 1982, she drove Acharn Candasiri and myself

from Chithurst to Cornwall to spend the three-month *Vassa* retreat at Resugga, near Truro where Jane and her husband Ian lived. We stayed in a part of their home that had been temporarily transformed into a lovely *vihāra*. We enjoyed having access to her extended property where we spent many hours doing walking meditation, or *jongkrom*.

This remains a memorable and happy period of my monastic life for which I will always be grateful to Jane and Ian. For quite a few years Acharn Candasiri and myself had been doing hard physical work at Chithurst and the *Vassa* in Cornwall offered us a marvellous reprieve – all the time in the world to dedicate ourselves to formal practice.

We became the recipients of the most generous and loving support. Jane and Ian were an incredibly warm couple, showing the most amazing tolerance towards these two young ‘bald-headed females’ dressed in white and spending most of their time either sitting or walking in silence. The patience of our hosts was very touching.

I have fond recollections of Jane devotedly feeding her animals – her hens, the donkey, ponies, cats and dogs, as well as her peacock Algernon – before eating her own breakfast with her husband. She didn’t have to worry about breakfast for us as we were only eating once a day, around mid-morning. Since that time,

Jane has remained a dear spiritual friend with whom I always enjoy sharing the Dhamma. I also love her subtly eccentric take on life.

I first heard Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho teach in 1997 when I met him during a brief visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad, where he had gone to become a disciple of Ven. Acharn Mahā Boowa after having spent several years in London as the senior incumbent of the Hampstead Vihāra (1957-61).

Later, I had the opportunity to listen to recorded talks he had given to Western monks living in Thailand's forest monasteries. I enjoyed listening to his teaching and felt inspired by the thoughtful and profound answers to the many questions that the monks brought to him. He shared his experience of monastic life and Dhamma practice with great modesty and simplicity, with a refreshingly pragmatic and down to earth wisdom that resonated deeply.

The letters uncover aspects of Jane's life that I rarely heard her talk about. I knew that Acharn Mahā Boowa was her teacher and that over a period of twenty years Jane had travelled to Thailand a dozen times to receive his teachings and to deepen her practice. But it was only after reading Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho's letters that I realised the extent to which, throughout Jane's life, Acharn Paññā, as he was known, had played an important role as her teacher, mentor and spiritual friend.

I was amazed to learn of the trials and tribulations that Jane went through on her spiritual journey and how, encouraged by Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho, she was determined to overcome them by travelling out to Thailand to receive the teachings of the great meditation master, Ven. Acharn Mahā Boowa. Sixty years ago the Northeast of Thailand was considered to be a wild and lawless area, as well as being subject to frequent Communist insurgencies. The letters reveal the extent to which it was a risky undertaking. Apart from tropical diseases, living conditions were spartan as Wat Pa Baan Taad was considered to be one of the strictest forest monasteries.

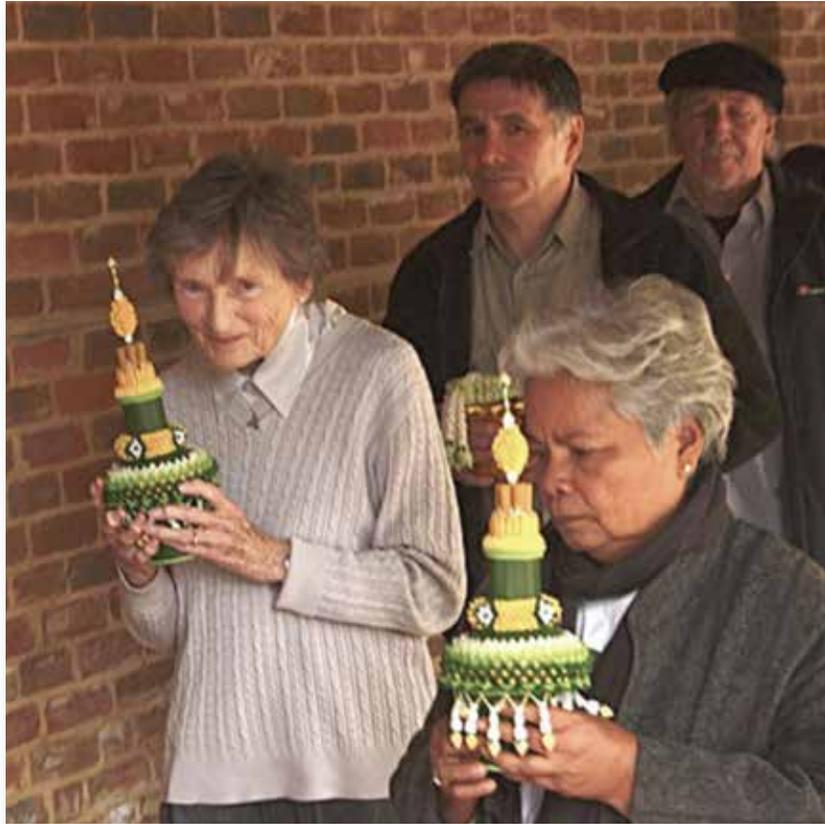
Mainly this book gives an insight into a unique spiritual friendship and a great wealth of Dhamma teaching from a deeply respected Acharn of the Forest Tradition. We can only feel deeply grateful to Jane as we make our way through this treasure trove of wisdom for having had the willingness and energy to put together this remarkable collection of Dhamma teachings.

Aj Suddatā

Senior Nun at Amaravati Monastery,

England 2016

Jane Browne and friends



*Dedication of the ashes of
Acharn Maha Boowa at Amaravati*

50 Alexandra Road
London N.W.8

18th Nov: 1961.

Dear Mrs Jane Browne,

Thanks for your letter; I am off to Thailand on Tuesday 21st, so I am afraid you would not find me there next Thursday. I was actually in Oxford giving a talk about two weeks ago, but it was to the meditation group, who are only very loosely connected with the University. I suggest, if your daughter is interested in Buddhism, that she contacts Mr Robert Exell, who will probably introduce her to the Winds, and whose house, several of the meetings take place. It is a pity that I missed her, but that is the way that Karma works.

I rather doubt whether you will now be able to get to London before I go off, so I will wish you all the best of Karma for the future, and I do hope that your meditation practice will develop well.

Yours sincerely

Chitkhan Panavaddha

P.S. My address in Thailand, in case you want to write, will be: - Wat Chola Prataon Rangsit Nondaburi, Thailand. P.T.O

The Letters

50 Alexandra Road
London N.W.8
United Kingdom
18th November, 1961

Dear Mrs Jane Browne,

Thanks for your letter. I am off to Thailand on Tuesday the 21st, so I am afraid you would not find me here next Thursday. I will wish you all the best of kamma for the future, and I do hope that your meditation practice will develop well.

In case you want to write, my address in Thailand will be:

Wat Cholapatarn
Rungsrit, Nonthaburi
Thailand

Yours sincerely,

Bhikkhu Paññāvadāho

Jane's Recollections,

This news saddened me. I had first crossed paths with Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho, as he was then called, at the Buddhist Society Summer School in 1958, where he gave a brilliant talk on Dependent Origination, insight into which had led to the Buddha's Enlightenment. I had never heard that teaching before. It was supposed to be too complicated for the average enquirer, but Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho's explanation made sense to me. I remember being so impressed with the way he explained its inner workings: how it was possible with mindfulness, concentration and wisdom to break the wheel of becoming at the link between feeling and craving. When I later found confirmation of this in one of the Buddha's Suttas in *The Middle Length Sayings* (MN 38 – *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya*, The Great Discourse on the Destruction of Craving), I felt that I had found a teacher I could follow.

I joined his annual meditation retreats, which were held in a house at Oxford. They followed a strict Burmese Mahasi Sayadaw routine. In order to maintain mindfulness, everything had to be done at a snail's pace. We were allowed to walk up and down on a path in the garden; otherwise, apart from communal mealtimes, which were eaten in silence, we remained in our rooms. Eating was not allowed after midday, and there were no group meditations or talks; even reading was discouraged. Whoa, I had never experienced such a silence like that; my mind and body rebelled. However, the daily interviews with Bhikkhu

Paññāvaḍḍho were what kept me going, for he would bring me back to calm and a sense of purpose. This ended up being the main role he had in my life for the next forty years.

Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho rarely talked about himself, and as a teacher he was a rather a remote figure. I have since read with great interest about his childhood and his reasons for becoming a Buddhist monk in the first half of the excellent book about his life and teaching titled *Uncommon Wisdom*, by Acharn Dick Silaratano.

Briefly, Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho was born in India, the country of the Buddha, on the 19th October, 1925. His father, who came from a Welsh mining family, was an engineer in the Kolar goldfields of Mysore province.

At the age of seven, young Peter Morgan was sent back to England to be educated. He was left with his elderly grandparents and had rather a lonely early childhood. Given a Meccano set, he amused himself by building complicated machines. Later he constructed model airplanes that flew and shortwave radio sets.

At one of the many schools he attended during that period, he developed tuberculosis in one foot, probably due to drinking unpasteurised milk. His mother returned from India to care for him and eventually became a matron at Cheltenham College so that she could stay close to him. When Peter graduated from Cheltenham, he was sufficiently qualified to go to the Faraday School of Electrical Engineering in London. Mercifully, his tubercular

foot prevented him from becoming actively involved in World War II. After the war, Peter went out to India to work with his father in the gold mines.

When they returned to England, and while on holiday in Switzerland, tragedy struck the family. Peter's father suffered a severe heart attack and died in his wife's arms by the side of the road. This tragic event was a wakeup call for Peter Morgan. He began to question the purpose of life and thought the answer might lie in the world's great religions. After an exhaustive search, he eventually came upon a book about the Buddha's teaching. Intrigued by what he read, he started to visit the Buddhist Society in Ecclestone Square. There he met a Buddhist monk named Bhikkhu Kapilavaḍḍho and decided to become a monk himself.

Peter Morgan was ordained as a monk in Thailand on 27 January 1956, but due to circumstances beyond his control, he soon returned to England and took up residence at Sangha House on Alexandra Road in London. That's where Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho began his teaching career. Five years later, as he was giving a talk in a hall near Westminster, a man in the audience was so impressed by what he heard that he donated a large sum of money to the English Sangha Trust. This donation was used to buy a substantial house on Haverstock Hill where several monks could stay. By that time, Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho felt he had done all he could in England and that the time had come for him to develop his own practice; with that as his goal, he flew back to Thailand.

Having been given an address in Thailand, I wrote often to Tan Paññā, as I began to call him, and he was good enough to reply. What happened next in his life will unfold in the following letters.

Because some of the many problems I experienced on the path of practice are likely to be shared by other serious practitioners, I decided, after much deliberation and encouragement, to make these wonderful letters available in the hopes that they will be helpful to others.²

2. Jane's letters to Ajahn Paññāvaḍḍho were not retained by him so only this one-way correspondence is available. Jane's recollections were added later for the purpose of this book.

Wat Cholayratarn

21st June, 1962

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your letter, and I am sorry not to have answered it earlier, but time slips by rather fast out here with little to distinguish one day from the rest. I have recently been attacked by Māra in the form of a recurrence of the tuberculosis infection of my right foot, which means that the doctors have encased my foot in plaster and put me on daily injections of streptomycin. It will be four months before I can go off to the jungle, and even then, I shall have to be rather careful. The Thai people have been very kind, and the doctors are good. Even though there is no Public Health Care Service out here, the doctors never ask for money from a monk.

With regard to your meditation practice, I would not bother too much about *nimittas*; they will come in their own good time. They are likely to take a form that one least expects (remember that *nimittas* are objects perceived by the *citta*), and they can arise in any of the senses. Whether you have *nimittas* or not, the important thing to always keep

in mind is: (A) mindfulness and (B) a clear lucidity of mind paired with a questioning attitude.

Actually, I don't think you will have much difficulty with either of these if you can overcome your chief *bête noir*, which I am almost certain is sloth and torpor based on sensual desire. I expect that you will find this problem arising in your meditation practice as a feeling of weight on your shoulders and a desire to go to sleep or just lie down. If you find this happening, the best thing to do is to look on it as an excellent opportunity to overcome sloth and torpor by sitting bolt upright, trying not to leave the practice until this feeling has been overcome. It is a difficult thing to overcome, but if you can pull it off, you have beaten the craving of this body – even if only temporarily – and that is a very definite gain.

Yours sincerely,

Bhikkhu Paṇṇāvaddho

Jane's Recollections

Most people in those days, when Thailand was considered rather a wild and lawless land, would have returned to England to be cared for by the National Health Service on hearing that they had anything as serious as a recurrence of tuberculosis, but Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho had faith in the Thai doctors and was not going to give up his search for a teacher. It must have been a frustrating and testing time for him.

With regard to the above advice on my meditation practice, I had always felt ashamed of the fact that I didn't get any *nimittas* arising as other meditators about me seemed to have. I was surprised to hear that Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho thought my chief *bête noire* was sloth and torpor, as I considered myself to be a hard-working sort of person. I guess I was doing the wrong kind of work. Of course, as with all good teachers, Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho was only pointing out what he considered would be my greatest problem: sensuality displaying itself as tiredness and fatigue. I can see now that it was true; but back then I dismissed it.

Wat Cholayratarn
6th September, 1962

Dear Jane,

I was glad to hear that you got away for some meditation practice even if it was cut short. With regard to the walking practice, I use this practice for two reasons: the first being to develop calm due to the slow movement, and the second being to train one's mind to keep to the present, to what one is doing. I am very doubtful about trying to see *anattā* in the walking process until you really have a good ability in *samādhi*. In fact, I am very doubtful about trying to force *vipassanā* in any way – it's a bit like squeezing the chicken to make it lay an egg prematurely: all one gets is a mess.

You see, one of the greatest difficulties in England (and out here amongst the intelligentsia) is that of setting a standard in Buddhism. Few realise what a high standard the Arahant has reached, and people too easily talk about *samādhi* and *vipassanā* and too easily speculate on their meaning. There is an excellent *sutta* which illustrates this on page 190 in *The Middle Length Sayings, Vol. II* in which the Buddha gives the

illustration of a blind man who hears of a clean white cloth and ends up really wanting one. Someone palms off a filthy old rag on him, telling him it's a clean white cloth, and he becomes very happy thinking that he now has a clean white cloth. This simile is used differently in the *sutta*, but it applies equally in this case.

On your question of meditation being only one of the steps of the Eightfold Path: it's not as simple as that, for meditation comes into three steps of the Eightfold Path (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Samādhi) and is involved in the remaining five steps. With this in mind, I suggest you read Sutta No. 117 in *The Middle Length Sayings, Vol. III* on page 113.

Yours sincerely,

Bhikkhu Paṇṇāvaddho

Jane's Recollections

In the 1960s, my husband and I were living in a farmhouse in Crabwood near Winchester. I was then in my early thirties, happily married for the second time, and had two lovely children at boarding school. I had converted an old well house on our property into a shrine room so that I could do my meditation practice in the early hours before anyone was up. It was there that the Hampshire Buddhist Society was born.

I was working pretty hard and consistently at the practice at this time, not only at home but off by myself doing retreats two or three times a year. When I mustered up the self-discipline, solitary retreats were by far the most productive, and they placed me in good stead for when I was to go off to Thailand. I was very lucky to have a settled home life; and my husband, Ian, was a sailor who knew how to look after himself.

Sometimes I wonder why I pursued the path with such intensity; I guess it was just my way of going about such a thing. For the first thirty years of my life, I had sought after and then attained pretty much everything that is considered by society important to one's happiness. And yet I remained dissatisfied, oppressed

and imprisoned by some hard facts of life. I could see that anxiety and pain were coming my way, because I could see that death was going to be taking everyone I loved out of my life. And, on top of that, I had to contend with the quite disturbing issue about the very real possibility of an all-out nuclear war, since the Cuban Missile Crisis was going on at that time. Christianity and psychology weren't working these issues out for me. I liked a certain philosophy or two, but nothing really got itself into my heart like the teaching of the Buddha.

Wat Cholayratarn

16th November, 1962

Dear Jane,

I am not sure if I have yet thanked you for sending the *Vimuttimaggā: The Path to Freedom*, but in case I haven't: thank you very much. It is, I reckon, of extremely good value and reads as though the author really knew the meaning of what he says, which one cannot say for much of the *Visuddhimaggā: The Path of Purification*.

With regard to your meditation practice, the most important thing is to just go on doing it regularly and, at the same time, try to develop mindfulness and clear awareness at all times. That is where your main stress should be. The monks here seem to think of mindfulness as being a 'watcher,' located in the head, which looks down and controls or restrains the impetuous movement of the *citta*, or heart. But, in saying this, 'looks down' means 'to be aware of' and has nothing to do with seeing with the eyes.

Actually, it seems as though your *kammaṭṭhāna* has changed somewhat, which means that your practice of *ānāpānasati* will probably not develop much more until you have managed to maintain equanimity under all the day-to-day conditions that you normally meet with. In other words, your next most pressing need is for *khanti* (patience), in your daily household duties and so on. I suggest that you tackle this by first closely examining how, why and where impatience arises. From there you will be more prepared for the enemy when it comes. Secondly, you must start thinking often about patience and how impatience means aversion and thus attachment; and how, when impatience is present, unhealthy *akusala* states are present, thus creating a situation in which you cannot be mindful. Another thing you may try is the stopping of all your thoughts (in terms of words) while doing your household duties. If you can succeed at this, things will be very good.

I wouldn't bother too much about 'flashes of insight.' These will come of their own accord from time to time when your state of heart is adapted to them. The important thing here is the steady change that takes place in your attitude to life. When your attitude has suitably changed, then insight will come in the most unassuming guise, simply showing up the whys and wherefores of your old unhealthy attitudes and thus confirming and fixing in place your new attitude. It is rather like buying

a second-hand car: all the bargaining and haggling is like developing the new attitude, and the simple writing of the cheque is like the insight – confirming what is already attained. This is the way I see it at present.

One thing you could try to develop over the years is to start relating things to your own *citta*, or heart. By doing this, ‘good or bad’, ‘important or unimportant’ and so forth won’t be thought of in relation to worldly events, but in relation to your own *citta*. This is what determines the Right Path – the wrong path being putting the focus of your attention, and hence your judgement of good and bad and so on, upon worldly things and events. The Right Way is to assess values in relation to ‘curing your own heart.’ This is the Ariyan Way; there is no other.

If you can understand this and develop it to such an extent that other ways of thought are seen as rather quaint and peculiar, you will in effect have the full foundation of Right View. And as the Buddha said, “Right View inclines and flows towards Nibbāna as the Ganges River inclines and flows towards the sea.” From such a point of view, the meaning and value of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* will be quite obvious to you. What will also become obvious to you is that the Buddha’s teaching on cause and effect concerns one’s own *citta*; for the *citta* is the centre and core of the world, with all other things like shadows and dreams floating around it. In saying

this, please don't think that I have attained this state. At most, I have had enough experience to know that such a state must be something like this.

I am glad that you like Jhānananda. She is a bit rough at times, but is genuinely a very good person. She is a bit disillusioned by her past experiences, for she has had several teachers in the past and practically every one of them has turned out to be a dead loss. Nevertheless, she will still go and pick out the schizoid-paranoid type of teacher. Her *kamma* is unfortunate in this respect, which is a great pity. I think that, in time, she will find what she is looking for – but not in this life. But please don't tell her this, for it would not help her at all.

I imagine that the note in your letter regarding storms refers to the recent storm in South Thailand. It came to us as nothing more than a pleasantly cool wind. But in the south, it apparently blew the sea inland in huge waves. And because the houses there are built off the ground on wooden poles, they all broke up like match boxes. I believe there was much loss of life, but I don't know the full story as I rarely see any newspapers. The area where the storm hit is about five hundred miles down the peninsula from Bangkok.

Yours sincerely,

Bhikkhu Paṇṇāvaddho

Wat Cholayratarn
December, 1962

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter and interesting comments. It sounds as though your practice has been going very well, but you must now turn to investigation and learn to keep your mind on and within your body. Also, beware of any *nimittas*, which could be anything from visuals of light, scenery, people and *devas* to sounds of a corresponding nature. If any of these come up, you should just think of them as being impermanent and thus *dukkha* with no substance in them (*anattā*). Reject them; that is, no grasping.

It is also necessary to be mindful of feelings. Thus, you may end up feeling elated, depressed, afraid or anxious at times, and you have to be sure to just recognize them as pleasant, painful or neutral feelings. This is important because, when you 'return to the world' after a good go at the body investigation practice, you are likely to get quite a significant reaction in one way or another. Another essential thing is your need to think more in terms of the heart, or middle of the chest, than the solar

plexus. The heart is the important centre, for it is less likely to give rise to aversion than the solar plexus. It is at the heart that the sense of ‘I am’ is located, which is the main trouble.

You may encounter some difficulties in your meditation practice over the Christmas holidays (it’s odd how a great Christian festival ends up becoming one of the most mundane times of the year). But never mind this; the important thing now is to develop an adjustment to daily life, as you are hardly in a suitable situation to live in a tent in the jungle. If you can deal with your current situation, you will have the enormous advantage of being able to practise anywhere and at any time. The essentials for doing this are: being mindful, keeping your mind on or within your own body (no ‘outgoing exuberance’), trying to stop thoughts of the past and future, trying to see the world as an array of dream images (like the images on a cinema screen), and practising *mettā*. I have enclosed some suggestions on *mettā*. They are purely experimental, so if they don’t work, don’t use them.

All this is a fairly tall order, I know, and I think that most of it you’ve already been trying to do. But there’s one further thing: you must be very watchful of conceit. The further people progress, the more dangerous conceit becomes to them. With that being said, it is advisable

to avoid all thoughts and ideas of having attained to the Path of *Sotāpanna* and the rest. If anyone short of an Arahant tells you that you are a *Sotāpanna*: don't believe it. An Arahant is most unlikely to tell you this anyway. There are few people, even out here in Thailand, who know what the words *Sotāpanna* and the rest really mean. And yet there are plenty of people here and in England who believe that they are Stream-Enterers and thus do themselves great harm.

It is important that you try to avoid assuming things too easily. An example of not doing this is in your very first letter where you write, "The actual registering of the touch is the mind, isn't it?" Frankly, I don't know. But the important thing is this: your conclusion is based on certain experiences and is merely intellectual. Whenever this sort of thing starts happening, you should always conclude with the magic words, "I don't know." This kind of doubt is a superb safeguard against the awful demon of 'attachment to opinions' (*diṭṭhi-upādāna*) and is not to be confused with nagging indecision, which is *akusala*.

Vipassanā is like drinking hot soup and knowing it is hot. In such a case, neither the intellect nor doubt have any bearing on the subject. There is great danger in trying to force *vipassanā*, which simply cannot be done. *Vipassanā* depends on developing *samatha*. It's like climbing a mountain:

if you do not climb, no amount of looking will reveal the view (*vipassanā* without *samatha*); when you have climbed and if you do not look, you will still not see the view (*samatha* without *vipassanā*). But with both together, the higher you climb, the more the view unfolds itself (though climbing must be done carefully, for it is not without dangers).

One final point: it is important to avoid getting too rigidly bound up in particular practice techniques, for one can easily start making the practice an end in itself. People's characters vary and, although it is quite possible to group people into types and then suggest a suitable practice technique, each person will still take a quite individual route. Any practice technique should be looked upon as a guide to keep you straight – but not a strait jacket – and it is important to keep the end in view (or rather not the end, but one's step by step purpose, for the end is rather far). I think the initial important purpose for you is to develop an outlook of faith, cheerfulness, *mettā*, patience, energy and watchfulness (*sati*) during your ordinary life. If these are not regularly present, your practice can lead to trouble. You should place these things very high on your list of things to be done.

I am telling you all this because you have no teacher available who can guide you. As your practice begins to bring results, you will have to rely

on your own inherent virtues, which must be fostered and made very strong to avoid possible dangers. You should not think of your head as “being your worst enemy,” for the real enemies are the *kilesas*, which are in the heart. As far as mental chatter goes, you should look in the heart for the cause of it – what goes on in the head is just the result.

I shall be going off to Kao Chalark this week. It will be quiet and peaceful there, and I shall stay for four weeks. I expect it will be freezing cold, for when the north wind blows from China, it does feel very cold and we all shiver. I hope you have a pleasant and not too hectic Christmas.

Yours sincerely,

Paññā

Wat Cholasratararn

13th February, 1963

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. Yes, we have had some rather cold weather here. It has dropped to about 38 degrees Fahrenheit at night, but usually gets up to about 80 degrees by midday. I am told that one place in North Thailand had snow which lay on the ground for 32 hours. But I think the cold weather is just about over, for the wind has changed, which means that it will get steadily hotter until the rains come.

I am glad to hear that your practice is still giving steady and good results. Perhaps the instructions that Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa gave me may also help a bit. He said that in order to concentrate the mind (*citta*) so that it gains in strength, I should use *ānāpānasati*; but when I feel that I want a real rest from practice, I just have to keep the mind within the body, thus preventing it escaping to external things. He said this preserves the 'strength' of the *citta*, which is then not dissipated. Exactly how I keep it within the body is not so important. I may do so by seeing or feeling, and I may let the *citta* wander where it

will within the body, as long as it does not escape out to external things. Lastly, he stressed the importance of mindfulness at all times.

With regard to gaining awareness of the heart position in the chest, it is best not to force it. I think you will get great value from this area if you try to find it from time to time, steadily persisting until it becomes clear. The value of this position is that *mettā* arises there – as well as associated joy – which is so effective in giving a person plenty of energy and in dispersing aversion and depression. It is very important to know both the solar plexus and heart centres, and then later on the other centres, for much understanding and wisdom comes from them. But the heart brings the moderating influence of *mettā* which eases the hardness of too much investigation and *paññā*, thus helping with an even, balanced development.

I am out of my plaster cast now and free to go off to the jungle in the northeast, which I will be doing in two days' time. When I go to Wat Pa Baan Taad³, it will be no good sending letters there as the postal service peters out quite a distance before, so I will give you an address in Bangkok. Even then, your letters may take months to reach me. If there

³ Alternative spellings: Wat Pa Barn Tard and Wat Pa Ban Tat.

is a real emergency, put a large letter “S” in the top left hand corner of the envelope; then my contact in Bangkok will try and get the letter to me fairly quickly.

I hope your practice continues to develop steadily, and yet I wish you could come under one of the teachers out here for some time, as your practice is at a stage where that would be of great benefit. But you must have patience and develop mundane things and later, at the right time, the opportunity will occur.

Yours sincerely,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

This was Bhikkhu Paññavaḍḍho's last letter before leaving for Wat Pa Baan Taad, which became his home for the next forty years. I sensed a change of mood in this letter; his excitement and optimism shined through.

*Wat Pa Baan Taad
Udon Thani, Thailand
28th February, 1963*

Dear Jane,

I have now been in the forest for about a fortnight and thought I would let you and one or two others know how things are going. Everything is, of course, quite different from what I expected. First of all, this is not real forest as we think of it in England – with lots of trees, the odd tiger and elephant. In fact, this monastery is really quite civilized, for most of the huts are built of wood and are scattered about the monastery which covers an area about half the size of St. James' Park. The huts all have a cleared area of sand around them – well swept and very tidy – and the surrounding ground is covered with rough vegetation about 6 feet high and too thick to walk through. Secondly, apart from some of the food being slightly tasteless, and there being rather too much fish, the food seems to be quite good – and everyday there is far more than I can possibly eat. Thirdly, I was told the weather would be unpleasantly hot.

It may, of course, get very hot later in the year, but generally it seems to be a cooler and a far better climate than Bangkok.

I am now quite convinced of the correctness of my choice of teacher: Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa is even better than I had expected. He seems to be able to pinpoint what is wrong in my practice with great facility, and he does this without talking (my Thai is not good enough to discuss meditation anyway). Also, he rarely comes to my hut and I have not seen his; I meet him only in the large Meeting Hall at breakfast time. One of the first things he told me was that I should eat more food, and every day since he keeps telling me I should eat plenty. And, of course, he is right. I tend to eat only a little food as I never feel hungry, and insufficient food means insufficient energy. So now I stuff myself up to my eyebrows. But this teaching is far from generally valid. Ācariya Mahā Boowa also teaches the value of eating little and fasting.

Since several *upāsikās*⁴ are living in this monastery, it struck me that if you ever wanted to come out here, Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa would probably be glad to help you in your practice and allow you to stay in this monastery for as long as you wanted. I know you are tied down at present, but if the opportunity arises and you are interested, just drop me a line.

4. *upāsikās* – lay women Buddhist practitioners

I am taking the opportunity of writing a few letters now, because the Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa has gone away for about a week and I am not spending so much time on practice. If you want to write to me here, there is no reason why you should not, for I don't think it will disturb my practice at all. But it may be a long time before I reply. I shall not be able to give you more than the simplest and most straightforward advice on meditation practice, for it would be wrong to do more than this as I am no longer an entirely free agent, so to speak.

Apparently, letters do reach the monastery fairly quickly, partly because the Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa is very well-known in the district of Udon Thani and everyone in the local village knows him and comes to this monastery. Although, if you do write, I think you will have to write the address in Thai.

Yours sincerely,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Tan Paññā carries the same positive, upbeat mood into this letter. Although touched by his suggestion here, I dismissed the idea of my going to Thailand as being impractical. I did not have the financial resources or any desire to venture into the wilds of the northeast, however civilized Wat Pa Baan Taad might seem to him!

At that time, I knew nothing about the abbot, Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa. It wasn't until Tan Paññā translated *Wisdom Develops Samādhi* – which I read again and again – that I began wishing to go to Wat Pa Baan Taad. Although my meditation practice was going much easier, I found I really hadn't changed very much. My mind was still at the mercy of desires and aversions when I lost mindfulness and my guard was down. When I saw this in myself, I started feeling the need for the guidance and inspiration of a teacher.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

13th April, 1963

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. The mailing address was quite legible, and the Thais had no difficulty in reading it. I translated the passages in your letter that refer to your practice into rather ungrammatical Thai and asked the Venerable Ācariya for his comments. To start with, he was very pleased that people in England should be seriously doing meditation practice. As to the way your practice is going, he was rather non-committal, I think because he does not know you and cannot gauge your character; but he seemed to infer that the results were normal and to be expected. His main observation was that the *citta* is 'the one who knows and walks the Path' and that the investigation of the five *khandhas* (32 parts of the body, etc.) plus the four *dhātus* and knowing them as *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* is the Path, with the result being happiness, emptiness, detachment, Nibbāna (all these being synonymous). He also said that consciousness, *citta* and 'the one who knows' are the same thing.

My own comments, which lack the authority of Venerable Ācariya but have the advantage that I know you and your environment, are as follows. I may be wrong but I don't think you have yet reached *bhavaṅga*, which means the state of calm has not yet truly penetrated to the heart. And don't worry about *nimittas* and lights; not everybody gets them in the way you specified. When you investigate the *khandhas* and *dhātus*, don't spread the field too wide but concentrate on that aspect which comes most naturally then and there – at one time it may be the body or one of the 32 parts; at another time it may be feeling and so on. Be very careful not to assume that you have attained any particular result of practice until there is no doubt whatsoever. This is very important when there is no teacher to quickly disabuse you. This is the big mistake that all the self-styled Arahants in England and elsewhere make. It is a trick of the *kilesas*. Generally speaking, you can reckon that the practice is going in the right direction if it produces results of calm, happiness and relaxation. And please don't think that the 'Dependent Origination' of the *khandhas* is well-established in you yet, for if this were the case you would nearly have attained enlightenment. I think what you mean is that the intellectual understanding of this is fairly well-established; but its realisation is far beyond the intellect, and

one must cross many bridges before getting there. Actually, the Dependent Origination of the *khandhas* and the seeing of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* are practically the same thing – like a flower and its colour, they are inseparable.

As to the heart position, the middle of the chest is right; and one must come to know and purify this, for it is the place where the *kilesas* are located – or rather it controls and commands them. *Samādhi* is what purifies the heart and leads to ‘freedom of heart’ (*ceto-vimutti*). I think one of your main difficulties is the same one I have: too much head activity (*saññā*) and not enough right (*kusala*) heart activity (i.e. the fullness of heart leading to *mettā*, *karuṇā* and the rest). To cure this, Venerable Ācariya’s first instructions to me were to eat a lot to gain strength to combat the *kilesas* and to try and keep the *citta* in the heart. The first is easily done, the second is difficult.

I have now had a chance to assess Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa’s ability as a teacher and his general character. I think it would be difficult to find a better teacher for he seems to be strong both in *paññā* and *samatha* and has also very strong *mettā*. The lay people around here all think he is an Arahant. I am a bit more cautious, because I know that it is impossible for the ordinary person to tell the difference between

the different stages of '*Ariya Puggala*', but they may well be right, for I have yet to see anything in him to disprove that he is Arahant. He seems to have no conceit and always looks either cheerful and happy or neutral and detached. He also has plenty of energy, and his complexion and features are 'bright.' He has been very kind to me and has hinted that he would welcome any other English people (or rather European and American) who would like to come here to practise meditation. Some time ago, he said that one day he may go to England. At the time, I thought he was just being polite or joking, but now I am not sure whether he was not making a prediction. Anyway, he has started to learn English and comes to me every day for about half an hour. He is learning by memorising short sentences in English, which I then read into a portable tape recorder that someone gave him. I have also come to realise what a difficult language English is, and why the Thais have a terrible time with English pronunciation and spelling. Thai is much easier for English-speaking people – although I still don't find it very easy.

I fear that it is likely to be a bit hard on the Tibetans in England, for the West is very overpowering for those who have not yet been 'inoculated' against it. The only hope that I can see for them is the

genuine development of the Saṅgha in England. There is too little realisation that big money and Dhamma don't go together easily: for where material things are big, spiritual things are likely to be small. I still think that the right way is a small cottage in the country to start with. It can then always grow as occasion demands.

It is a pity that you are unable to come out here to learn meditation, but when I mentioned it I rather thought that you would not be able to leave home at this time. However, perhaps the Teacher(s) will come to England and so make it unnecessary to come East with its language and climate difficulties. The English countryside is really much easier for meditation practice than the tropics. The heat, sweat, mosquitoes and innumerable other insects make the development of calm more difficult. I have a gecko lizard in my hut who makes a loud, ear-shattering noise just when I'm getting into practice. I will somehow have to try to induce him to leave.

The life of the *bhikkhus* here is a complete contrast to that in Christian monasteries where the monks are more or less secluded. In fact, I am told that several of the regular monks at this Wat are away wandering right now. And since I arrived, two have left the Wat to go wandering in the hills and forests, living under trees or in caves. I hope I will gain

health enough to do the same before I leave Thailand, but at present I must be careful. Seeing this gives me an idea of the sense of freedom which is associated with the Saṅgha out here and which I feel must be developed in the Saṅgha in England if it is to grow properly. Please excuse my small and scrawly writing, but there is not much space on these air letter forms and I am writing sitting on the floor.

Yours sincerely,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

A five-star letter with some excellent teaching. Unfortunately, many years passed before I really began to put it into practice.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

8th August, 1963

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. It arrived quite quickly in spite of the rainy season, which makes the road from Udon impassable to anything larger than a bicycle. I'm not surprised that your practice doesn't progress much at home. As the *suttas* say, "The householder's life is full of cares and worries." However, when you manage to get away you seem to do quite a lot of good, which is some compensation. But I reckon you need a long period of practice with a good teacher as I am hardly skilled enough to interpret many of the unusual experiences you have. I tried translating your letter to Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa, but when I came to "everything seemed to evaporate into a great sheet of sensitized cloud which pervaded everything and was everything and nothing!" – I'm afraid my Thai was very queer and he looked a bit puzzled.

He made no special comment except where you "searched for the one who knows the state", and here he said, "Yes, yes. That's good! It's quite

right.” It seems to me that you need to develop two things now: the first is ‘skill in taking the *nimitta*,’ which with *ānāpānasati* means fixing the awareness of the breath at the tip of the nose to start with. If the breathing dies away very quickly, then just keep attention on the tip of the nose until you find it again; or, you can try to gently force the breath into a slow, deep rhythm until you have fixed your attention to the nose tip, then let it go its own way while watching it. The second thing is to get to know the heart-base in the way you mentioned, as in when you felt an easing of the tension. An important thing to keep in mind whenever any of these experiences occur is to note where the centre of your attention lies. Thus if your thoughts, knowledge and the like are concerned with the object, whether it is a gross object in this world or a subtle *nimitta* experienced in meditation, your tendencies will still be outward-going – which is the wrong direction. But if the object is allowed to go its own way and your attention is on the heart-base (the ‘one who knows’ i.e. the subject), then you are developing the tendency to go inwards, which is the right way. It is also the right way if you develop attention inwardly on the parts of the body. But as this has its dangers, it’s probably best to avoid this until you have a teacher present who can steer you away from

the pitfalls. For the last five months, the Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa has been spending up to six hours a day learning English, so it is quite possible that he may go to England within the next five years.

With regard to the counting of breaths, it acts much like the repetition of *buddho*. The counting is a type of *parikamma* and should be kept up while you cannot otherwise stop distracting thoughts from arising. ‘Fixing attention’ should be practised until your attention does not waver. At that point, awareness of the whole breath (body) should have occurred. It is then time to search for ‘the one who knows’ the breath, but to search for it not as an ‘object,’ because the breath is the object. It really means getting down to the heart until there is an ‘inward knowing’ in the heart itself. But here I am talking more from knowledge than experience, for I still have much to learn in all this. The light is failing now and I can’t see what I am writing, so I must postpone the rest until tomorrow.

If you find that you are getting very tense, it probably means that you are trying to hold your mind onto the object (nose tip) with too much effort. Try retiring into the heart while ‘gazing’ at the nose tip (not visually). It’s rather like how you look at a painting in an art gallery:

quite relaxed, while feeling about in your heart to assess its meaning and worth.

As for my foot, it is far from cured. It is quite impossible to say whether 'the box' has had any effect or not, for one must take into account such changeable factors as weather, food, temperature, meditation practice, the environment, phases of the moon, etc. But I can't say I notice any marked improvement over the last three months. I'm afraid I have more faith in the pills than the box. But all the same, please thank the good Scottish lady who donated it for her efforts on my behalf. It would be interesting to try this box to stop the forest out here from growing so fast. Everything is covered with green creepers that can grow up to six inches a day in the hot weather. These vines must be continually cut back, or else within six months one might find it difficult to see where the Wat is. Even with that, somehow I think the forest would win.

Generally speaking, things out here are very peaceful; I never see a newspaper or hear the radio, and I don't know what's happening in the world. But I suppose it's all the same: rockets, bombs and Khrushchev. However, when I get a snake in my hut – which happens quite often now – it is of much more vital importance.

I find now that letters seem to arrive here quite successfully when the address is written in Roman characters, so there's no need to write it in Thai anymore.

Yours sincerely,

Paññā

P.S. I wish 'the box' could be tuned in to keep the mosquitoes away; that would be a real asset.

Jane's Recollections

Tan Paññā says that he is not surprised that my practice is not going so well at home. I'm not surprised either because I was full of restless energy at that time. I think it should be designated as the fourth defilement, greed, hatred, delusion and restless energy! Tan Paññā called it outgoing exuberance, but apart from him I have never been warned about it by any teacher. It is particularly virulent after long retreats. In my case, I accepted invitations to give talks on the Buddha-Dhamma to various groups of people, including Interfaith groups, Theosophists, and Humanists, without the necessary skill or knowledge. They were pretty bruising experiences, and I don't think I made any converts!

Among other things, I asked Admiral Shattock to give a talk in Winchester on his experiences of a Mahasi Sayadaw retreat in Burma. I arranged a big meeting for the anti-abortion organization Life and set up a local group. The following year the Hampshire Buddhist Society started up in the Shrine Room in my garden, instigated by the Ven. Sangharakshita. I think Patty Elwood must have brought him down for the inaugural meeting. I have a photo of him sitting in the garden with our Alsatian, Sukha. All this on top of the normal household life of cooking,

gardening, walking the dog, taking the children out from school, entertaining and visiting my widowed mother in Oxford. No wonder my practice faltered and my 'beginner's luck' ran out.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

24th September, 1963

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. As we are still in the rainy season, the weather is very changeable. We tend to get one or two days of hot, sticky weather before the clouds build up into great thunderstorms, bringing rain that cools it off for a day or two. As to the mosquitoes, they are voracious beasts, and it takes a lot to stop them. But I can't complain too much for they are far less numerous than in other places. That's because the ground here is a loose sandstone which, when it rains, the water soaks into and disappears in one or two hours' time. Which means the mosquitoes have to breed in small patches of water that are held in the leaves of trees and other places.

Yes, it's quite correct; *jhāna* does not get rid of the *kilesas*, but only temporarily suppresses the hindrances (*nivāraṇa*). For evidence of this, read The Discourse on Expunging in *The Middle Length Sayings, Volume I*. However, *jhāna* is necessary in order to clear the mind of the

hindrances so that one may develop insight into the five *khandhas* – and that does get rid of the *kilesas*.

With regard to the breath almost ceasing: this means that a state of calm is developing, for the breath is the function of the body which mainly influences the mind and vice-versa. But don't worry about that too much, for the important thing is to develop diligence in practising mindfulness of breathing at the nose tip. As it says in the *Visuddhimagga*: it's like sawing a piece of wood in that the carpenter knows when he makes a long stroke or a short stroke with the saw, but he always keeps his eye on the place where the saw contacts the wood. Similarly, you should keep your attention on the breath as it 'saws' away at the nose tip. If, while doing this, you feel your body grow thick and ponderous like a heavy balloon, you are going the right way as you are now going inwards. But the awareness of space you mentioned in your last letter doesn't seem to be the right way, for your attention is still going outwards. Although that experience of space may be interesting, Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa would prefer that you investigate the body. Don't worry that the basic makeup of the body does not arouse disgust in you at present. Instead, I suggest that you use your imagination to invent new ways of looking at the body. For

instance, the body is made up of food; food comes from this world; in the end the body returns to this world. Thus the body is entirely of this world and doesn't go beyond it. Being composed of the four elements, the body also chains you down to this world as long as you have attachment to it.

I think it will be two or three years yet before Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa goes to England, for he says that before he goes he must know English properly. He studies English constantly, but it is a difficult language for Thai people and will take him some time yet. Still, his pronunciation is already quite good and he has quite a good English vocabulary.

I was rather amused how Conze, in his last book *Buddhist Thought in India*, delivers a polemic against the noise in modern civilization, contrasting it with the quiet of the forest. He has obviously never been in a tropical forest. At night here of late I have about five cicadas (actually these are crickets, and I believe the longest variety) around my hut which make a noise that is a cross between a circular saw and a railway engine letting off steam. The sound is deafening, and they can keep it up for almost three hours nonstop.

Best wishes,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

12th January, 1964

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your two letters which arrived together. As to the various points you raise about your meditation practice, I have discussed them with the Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa with the following results.

With regard to the difference between *jhāna* and *samādhi*, it doesn't really matter very much whether you think of them as being the same thing or different, for those are only terms; whereas, what's important is the actual experience – regardless of what you call it. Venerable Ācariya Tate says in the book of his I translated that they are different; whereas, in the *suttas*, the Buddha defined *sammā samādhi* as the four *jhānas*. However, it is important to distinguish between *sammā* (right) *samādhi* (or *jhāna*) and *micchā* (wrong) *samādhi*: the former being that form of concentration which is going inward and away from craving and attachment, and thus leads to a coolness of heart. Wrong *samādhi*, on the other hand, tends to focus outward. Generally speaking, if your

practice is arousing states of coolness of heart, self-collectedness and a calm happiness, you can reckon that it is going alright.

With regard to knowing the four aggregates of mind separately, Venerable Ācariya didn't say anything about this. But my own understanding of it is that you can distinguish the four separately by turning your attention to them separately, although they will of course all be present simultaneously – much as in a stew you can distinguish its colour, smell, taste and temperature separately, and yet you can't separate any one of these from the stew. Having said that, I think it may be possible to separate *viññāṇa* from the others; but this would require very great skill in practice even if it is possible. I shouldn't worry much about it anyway, for it's not an immediately practical issue and will probably come out in the wash in due course.

As to your seeing the loathsomeness of the body, Venerable Ācariya was very interested in that. He said that when this happens you should not be afraid, because, although the body is loathsome, the *citta* is not. And in any case the body is not yourself, so it doesn't matter that it happens to be loathsome. If this experience arises again, you should try to not let your mind go outward into worry about how you are going to “live with this thing,” but immediately go inward and examine the parts of

the body until your attachment to your body falls away and you realise the *citta* as existing alone and separate from the body. But don't worry about the consequences regarding home, family and so on, because if you can get free of the attachment to your body, all of that business will go on alright. And even if it did prove a bit difficult, it would be well worth it, for opportunities such as this don't occur often in *samsāra*.

As to watching things from the heart-base, Venerable Ācariya's only comment was, "Good. Yes, that's right. Go on like that!" I shouldn't worry overmuch about the theoretical considerations of what's exactly happening as you will probably be able to find out all about it in due course. At present, the main thing is just to go on.

Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa says that he thinks a lot about how he can help you and one or two others. He says that if he could speak English well he could help you to progress very quickly. As it is, he's trying to learn English as fast as he can. I think that in about two years he will probably be fairly fluent. I suggest, however, that you consider the prospect of spending a month or two away from home when the Venerable Ācariya comes to England in order to get a really good chance of getting down to practice under proper guidance. When,

where and for exactly how long, I don't yet know, but he has the full intention of going to England one day.

Out here, things are going on much as usual; the plaster cast is off now – for the last time I hope – though I don't yet know to what extent it has helped my foot heal. At present, we are in the cold season (although so far it hasn't been very cold) and my foot usually seems to improve in the cold weather. One day I shall have to go into town to get an X-Ray to find out what has happened, if anything.

I hope you manage to survive the Christmas festivities. It means practically nothing out here, except to the few Christians in Thailand.

All Best Wishes,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

I don't remember that insight into the loathsomeness of the body, but I do remember a very shattering insight into the inevitability of death and the grief it caused and how I felt like rushing out and warning everyone that they were going to die! Of course I had known people who had died, having lost a much respected and loved cousin of 18 just before the war started. It had shaken my Christian beliefs. But the realisation that everyone had death hanging over them hit me very hard. It somehow made a mockery of everything we were so busy doing. Also I felt perturbed about bringing two children into the world when I could do nothing to protect them or their children from death.

I had forgotten that Acharn Mahā Boowa had tried so hard to learn English. He made no attempt to speak it when Freda Wint and I went to Thailand the following year. I never felt it was a drawback for, as Tan Acharn said, he taught from the heart. I learnt so much just from being at his Monastery, Wat Pa Baan Taad, and watching how the monks and lay people went about their daily tasks. Sometimes

the women there would translate something that he had said at the mealtime that they thought would be helpful. I found the Thai people very intuitive and naturally sympathetic and uncritical. Of course, there were times when he would speak to us directly with Tan Paññā translating.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

23rd February, 1964

Dear Jane,

I am enclosing two photos of Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa. Would you keep one for yourself and send one to Freda. If I can get a better photo sometime, I will send it along. This one was taken by a friend in the *sālā* (hall) here, and it is not too bad.

Recently, I received a letter asking me to return to England to take charge of the Saṅgha. Out here, the length of time a *bhikkhu* has been in the Order is regarded as not all that important, and often the monastery's abbot is not the most senior monk living there.

In this Wat everything is kept clean and orderly. The grounds are swept every day, while the large *sālā* is cleaned and its floor polished every morning between 6 and 7 am. Venerable Ācariya is very insistent on the place being kept clean and orderly, and we all have to help in doing the work.

Freda really shouldn't let herself get worked up about what Conze says about Theravāda. As far as I know, Conze has never practised the way of *kammaṭṭhāna* with a proper teacher of either Theravāda or Mahāyāna, and so all he has is book knowledge and what he has thought out for himself. Intellectually he is very clever, but emotional development is the first important step, without which a good intellect is liable to be a real menace. In such a case, the *kilesas* located in the emotions will take hold of a good intellect and use it to make certain that there is no threat to their existence. They do this by giving rise to *māna-ditṭhi*, which acts like a great barrier to stop a teacher or anyone else from getting in and disturbing the *kilesas*. I don't mean to criticize Conze in this vein, even though I think this is partly true in his case. However, I don't think he is too rigid in his views. I feel rather sorry for him because he has a lot of *dukkha*, and I rather doubt whether he is going the right way about getting free of it.

I shall be going to Bangkok in April or May for a medical check-up, and at the same time, I will be re-ordained into the Dhammayut Nikāya. This is the smaller of the two monastic orders in Thailand, the other being the Mahā Nikāya (of which I am presently a member). The Dhammayut Nikāya was started by King Mongkut about a hundred years ago. Truly

speaking, he did not found it; rather, while he was still a *bhikkhu* he was re-ordained into the Mon sect, and before he became King, the new Order was re-named 'Dhammayut.' The Mons got their Buddhism from Ceylon while it was still flourishing there. This monastery and all the *bhikkhus* here are Dhammayut.

We now have a young American⁵ staying with us. He was doing a world tour until he reached Thailand, where he learnt about Buddhism – which he previously had had no interest in – and within nine months was ordained as a *sāmaṇera* (novice). I think he will make a very good *bhikkhu*, for he is very ready to learn and seems to have a generally good character. He spent most of his life in Canada.

I am afraid I have read very little Christian mystical literature, though the little I have read is very good and may be really helpful to someone who is developing *samādhi*. The main difference between Christian and Buddhist works is that the former have little traditional material to refer back to, and so the authors must write in their own free style which has the advantage of freshness and often leads to much more inspiring literature. But it does suffer in that there is no unanimity

5. Tan Cherry.

of approach and technical terms. Also the Christians often write ‘too high’ – beyond the understanding of the average person – whereas the Buddhists are mainly writing at a much more mundane level, with the higher things being given in stereotyped formulas. The essential difference is that, in Buddhism, it is always assumed that someone practising meditation will have a teacher who will fill in all the gaps. The teacher guides the pupil and by his discourses inspires him and rouses his faith, which is rarely the case with the Christian mystic.

I wonder how the Belgian Canon at Winchester views your activities. It wouldn’t surprise me if, with the general state of religion nowadays, he was quite glad to see and talk to someone who is generally interested and really practising, Christian or otherwise. He must meet so few who have any idea of the true nature of religion.

An interesting thing about Christianity: one day Venerable Ācariya said to me, “I have examined Christianity and it’s not the way!” He spoke in English and made no further comment. But from the other things that he has said at various times, I gather that his ideas are much as my own: that Christianity can be very good and effective in developing *sīla* and *samādhi*, but it is mainly defective in *paññā*. Also, the means and views that Christianity uses to promote *sīla* and *samādhi* are likely

to create great problems if and when *paññā* is developed. You can sometimes read of such problems in mystics whose insight ran contrary to doctrine, and who had to go against either the established Church or what they saw to be the truth.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

A few Recollections on this letter. I remember the Belgian Winchester Canon being repelled by the idea of anyone trying to perfect themselves, he used the example of trying to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps. Only God was perfect and through the sacrifice of his son we might become perfect. I didn't argue with him, but it is my belief that you can only alleviate the suffering of others through self-sacrifice. "Buddhas do but point the way, you yourself must make the effort."

I would say that Christianity is good at promoting *sīla*, but not very effective in developing it. Just to tell someone to be good is not very helpful. It takes accepting the teaching on *kamma* and its results to encourage one to do the practice of meditation and discernment. However, it seems that for lasting results there has to be a complete shift in one's mental DNA and this can only be brought about by the insights which free up one's mind from the delusion of selfhood. A paradox only solved by transcendence to a state where it is said the liberated one lives in accordance with Dhamma. Luckily now there are many good teachers in the West to guide us.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

2nd April, 1964

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your two letters. I received the first after returning from Bangkok where I had to stay for about five weeks to wrestle with the Immigration Authorities over permission to stay in the country. There was no special difficulty in this matter, but government officials never move fast in any country. In accordance with Parkinson's Law, they have created vast quantities of paperwork for themselves, which takes ages to work through. However, all is well now and I have a permanent resident permit, so there should not be much difficulty in staying long-term in Thailand.

With regard to your 'sitting meditation practice,' I have always found that when I can sit in a cross-legged position the practice goes a bit easier. But the general opinion out here is that if that proves to be too difficult, you should use whatever posture you find to be best by trial and error. You may even lie down or stand up to practice if you find that such a posture helps to attain *ekaggatārammaṇa*. As to long periods

of practice, people seem to differ on the value of this. For some, a long stretch is the best way; whereas for others, walking alternating with sitting works best. Again, this is an individual matter to be discovered by trial and error. But I think in the end you will find that long periods of practice develop of themselves without any special effort.

With regard to your question as to whether the six sense fields can influence one another, I can only speak from theory on this. The thing to remember is that the six fields are not permanent fields. Thus, supposing you are seeing, then after a moment the seeing consciousness dies away and then perhaps hearing arises. That hearing may be dependent on or related to the previous seeing, and in this sense there may be some influence between the sense fields; but you would have to plunge into the Abhidhamma texts to confirm this.

Generally speaking, Mrs. Q was quite correct in that you should stick to the basic facts. It is no use speculating about the top of the mountain when you are still climbing slowly up the bottom slopes – at least while you are doing the practice. This attitude of questioning things in the Dhamma is quite good for it develops *cinta-māya-paññā* (wisdom based on thinking). But it is important not to let it get too speculative, nor to let it set up any fixed opinions and views, for these will lead to *diṭṭhi*

which can be a great hindrance. The right attitude is always: I think but I don't know. Also, beware of thinking that you understand things in Dhamma, for until you reach the state of seeing directly (*ñāṇa*), in such a way that you cannot doubt even if you try, your understanding is still of an intellectual nature which, although useful, is not the real thing. The number of people who understand Dhamma intellectually are many (including myself), but the number who see it directly are few. You may find it worth reading the fourth and perhaps fifth volume of the *Book of the Discipline* translated by I.B. Horner. The Buddhist Society has copies which you could borrow. Some of it won't be of much interest to you, but there is quite a lot that is very good. Those books indicate the method of training very well (although for monks), and it is interesting how much stress is laid on ordinary behaviour in a monk's daily life.

Another point is not to bother too much about trying to grasp the nature of consciousness just yet, for this is very subtle and is at the top of the mountain. You would do far better sticking to body and feelings – especially body – for this is the first and greatest attachment to overcome, and perhaps the most difficult. And similarly, I shouldn't worry about *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* with respect to the *citta* yet; but

by all means continue to keep on seeing these three marks in body and feelings, where they are far more obvious. Remember that breathing in the *ānāpānasati* practice incorporates both body and feeling! The point is that if you can't see the three marks quite obviously in body and feelings (seeing emotionally, not intellectually), you will hardly be able to see them in the *citta* which is far more subtle; that is, unless you have developed a very high degree of skill in *jhāna*. But even then, I think it is still easier to see them in body and feelings.

I suspect that an unrecognized process of escape away from body and feeling and towards consciousness is taking place, which is rather nebulous and unknown, and so (to your emotional element) doesn't matter very much. But, this is for you to investigate, as I'm not sure.

My old foot seems to be more or less behaving itself, though I use it fairly sparingly. The doctors in Bangkok seem reasonably satisfied, but I'm not certain yet.

Please tell Jhānananda that I think of her and will try and get down to writing her one day soon.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

17th July, 1964

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. It is odd how letters from both you and Freda Wint usually seem to arrive on the same day.

With regard to the main issue of your letter, this is likely to be the result of past *kamma*, probably from lives prior to this one. This may even be a pattern which has repeatedly occurred before; that is, the development of meditation up to the point you have reached at present, then the arising of the *kilesas* to which you have given way. The thing to realise is that your meditation practice and your falling in love are not disconnected as I see it, for Māra (in the guise of the *kilesas*) is bound to try and throw a spanner in the works when there is any tendency towards success in getting free from *taṇhā*. The evidence for this is that you say you have known this person for a long time, but previously you have no more than admired him; but now it has changed into strong love. Love of this type and Dhamma are going in opposite directions: one is passionate and full of *taṇhā* and *upādāna*, and the

other is cool, leading to clear insight and freedom. Falling in love means that you allow your *citta* to be ‘hypnotized’ and swayed by the *kilesas*, causing you to lose self-control. A loss of self-control should be seen as something rather horrible, for you’re giving your *citta* away to someone else for him to do with it as he pleases, so to speak. And although he may be a good and trustworthy person, as your attachment increases, you will no longer be able to train yourself properly. Consider what happens when that person changes or dies.

Of course, you realise the danger in this, for as you rightly remarked, if you get carried away by this it may be many lives before you can recover. But, what to do? Firstly, try to avoid meeting this person as much as possible. Secondly, try to avoid meeting him on your own (a chaperone can be a great help). Thirdly, when you are not with him, try to avoid thinking of him. If possible, be mindful; but if that doesn’t work, turn your thoughts to anything else (for instance, you may try and do the daily crossword puzzle and keep your thoughts busy with the clues). Fourthly, try to develop mindfulness as strongly as possible so that when you meet this person the mindful habits you’ve developed have a chance of persisting.

Fifthly, investigate bodily feeling, and try to find out just what feelings arise when you meet that person. When you meet, try to watch your feelings and see just how they change. The feelings that arise and the ‘quivering’ are in fact forms of *pīti* that are based on wrong *samādhī* and are thus to be avoided. This method of watching feeling is very good if and when you have to meet that person. Sixthly, a small trick which may help: when you meet this person, make a resolve not to smoke (I believe you do normally smoke). This may help to turn your thoughts away from him and to the fairly innocuous craving to cigarette smoke. Seventhly, have a talk about this problem with Freda Wint. I’m very glad you’ve met her. She is a very good person with a great deal of wisdom, and she may help you quite a lot. She is quite trustworthy and completely honest.

I’m sure all this business is bound to bring you a lot of *dukkha* whatever way it goes, but the main thing is whether the *dukkha* will be of the type that leads you towards freedom or the type which is useless. In any case, you have my full sympathy and I’m sure that of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, although I haven’t had time to talk to him on this matter yet. You may find it useful to view this matter as a form of test: a test to determine whether you are suited to go on to higher states and to

more happiness than you have ever known. Though it is bound to be difficult, I think you will pass the test (although at times you may have a feeling of terrible loss and emptiness in the pit of the stomach). But, that is merely bodily feeling and is the price that you must pay for the physical and mental changes that take place to prepare you for higher states. To “stand and face this problem,” as you say you feel you must, is good practice, but try to avoid being overly bold in this approach; in fact, the best thing would be to avoid meeting this person. As to the dangers of meditation, it will not be dangerous as long as your motive is correct, your morality is good, and you are ready to face up to and accept whatever *dukkha* arises. As to sensuality arising in meditation, this can be countered by immediately turning to body contemplation, or death contemplation, until it subsides.

As to whether there is anything unwholesome about sex, I’m afraid that a full answer would run into more than two hundred pages. But, in the sense that I think you mean, attraction between male and female is fairly innocuous provided there is also plenty of restraint and that it does not give rise to strong attachment; although in the highest sense, it is not good because it gives rise to the *kilesas*. But if you mean sexual intercourse, the Buddha always said that this was “a low practice

indulged in by householders and those that enjoy pleasures of the senses.” At the same time, he did condone it for lay people (reference the third precept), provided that they acted in accordance with generally accepted social norms.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

This was my 'Brief Encounter' episode. It must have begun in the winter of 1963 and ended in 1964. Perhaps I should have left this incident out of this book, but Tan Paññā's warnings about the consequences of having 'given way' and his non-censorious advice was so helpful to me that I feel it should be shared in case anyone else finds themselves in the same predicament. On the surface it was all pretty innocent and I may have exaggerated the danger I felt myself to be in. It began as a friendship made at The Buddhist Society's monthly meditation evenings at Eccleston Square. He and I would walk back together to the tube station to get to our various destinations, chatting about Dhamma matters as we walked. Unlike Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson, we didn't even stop for a cup of coffee! The trouble began when we were together again at a 10-day retreat in Biddulph Hall somewhere in the Midlands, the whole thing really igniting on the bus journey back to London. There we were squashed together on a seat – absolutely fatal! We went our separate ways, but when I got home I found I was well and truly hooked. After thrashing and squirming about and making my husband's life a misery, I decided to ask Tan Paññā for help as stoicism was never

my strong point. I am told that as a child I would demand that a doctor be fetched when the least thing was wrong with me. Now that I come to think of it, perhaps another reason why I practised so hard was because I didn't like *dukkha*.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

20th July, 1964

Dear Jane,

I have now had a chance to talk to Ven. Ācariya Mahā Boowa about your letter of July 8th. First, with regard to your practice, he was very pleased and said that if you can develop that 'whirlpool' it will be very good. I presume that you feel yourself to be at the centre of the whirlpool, and the centre is still, but all around there is *anicca*. If that is so, you should stay in the centre with awareness as long as you can. But keep to the centre and don't let your mind wander out into the whirlpool. If you hear music or see visions (*nimittas*) external to that centre, just discard them as being distractions. The best thing is to keep your attention directed inwards and not outwards. With regard to the breathing practice, Ven. Ācariya said it is like someone who has lost a cow: first he follows the footprints, but once he sees the cow his interest in the footprints dies away.

With regard to the other matter, Ven. Ācariya said more or less the same as I wrote in my last letter to you. He said that you should reflect

how the other man and your husband are both four elements (or five *khandhas*), so why become more attached to one than the other? He also said that if you give way it would be very bad as far as *sīla-dhamma* is concerned. He also said that you should try as hard as possible not to let your *citta* go out to this person when you meet him (i.e. keep it inside yourself) and remain very mindful. At other times, don't think of him at all. Ven. Ācariya said that the repetition of *Buddho* (or *Dhammo* or *Saṅgho*) is a very potent remedy, for love is passionate like fire and the repetition of *Buddho* is like pouring water on the fire. Finally, when I explained to him that it all arose after your practice had been going well, he said, "Oh, it's Māra," and that the Lord Buddha had much the same sort of thing to contend with.

In effect, this all means that you have got a battle to fight and you must not underestimate the enemy (the enemy is your own *kilesa-māra*). The best weapon is, of course, mindfulness! Do not allow your *citta* to go out, but keep it inward. Whether you do this by repeating *Buddho*, by willpower controlling the *citta*, or by watching and examining your own bodily feelings and changes doesn't matter much. But you must take this matter as one of urgent seriousness, meaning that it is advisable

to think out and plan your tactics well in advance. You might, for example, inwardly reflect and examine precisely what changes take place to make your *citta* go out to this man when you meet him. Do this quite often, and then when you meet him, you will be well-prepared to counter the situation. I have given a lot of suggestions, and you must select and use what you find works best – but don't try and use them all. Here is another one: when you meet this man, think of death and imagine what this man would be like as a corpse. This may work very well, because you will find an internal revolt against such thought. This internal revolt will be your own *kilesas* 'squirming,' because Māra loves 'all things bright and beautiful,' and death, or the thought of it, hits him where it hurts most. It will also rapidly force your *citta* back inward and have quite a sobering and cooling effect. Some passages from the *Visuddhimagga* on the contemplation of a corpse may be quite helpful in preparing the ground for this. You must not let your admiration for this man stand in the way of any of these methods of controlling your own mind. Remember that they will do no harm to him at all and, if they are effective in cooling your own heart, they can do nothing but good.

One question Ven. Ācariya asked: Does this man love you? If not, it makes the problem that much easier; otherwise, you are likely to have

quite a difficult battle with Māra. I am enclosing a print of Ven. Ācariya Mun, who was Ven. Ācariya Mahā Boowa's teacher. Nobody here doubts that he was an Arahant, and at his cremation they found a number of *Arahatta-dhātu* in the ashes. These *Arahatta-dhātu* are called 'Holy Sārira' in other branches of Buddhism. They are small, hard and irregularly-shaped objects about a quarter inch in diameter which are often found after an Arahant's body has been cremated, while they are never found after an ordinary person's cremation. Sometimes they are like blue sapphires or clear like diamonds. The *dhātu* of the Buddha were said to be the second type. The inscription under the photo says "Ven. Ācariya Mun Bhūridatto. Aged 80 years. Born Thursday, the second lunar month, the Year of the Goat, Buddhist Era 2414 (1871 AD). Died Friday, the 6th night of the moon, the 12th month, the Year of the Ox, at 2:23 am, which equals the 11th of November, 2492 BE (1949). Cremated on Tuesday, the 31st of January, 2493 (1950)."

There is some mistake in this, as the dates of birth and death don't add up to eighty years, but very few country people in Thailand know the exact date (and sometimes year) of their birth, so the mistake is not very out of place.

One further point, the Ven. Ācariya Mahā Boowa never claims or displays any psychic powers. Therefore, he would never say that he could or would help you in your present problem except by the normal means of giving instructions as to what you should do. But nevertheless, he may help you quite a lot through the power of his *citta*, and you would be quite unaware of it. In fact, everyone here is quite sure that he has psychic abilities, but he never uses them in any way that is obvious or that does not allow of some normal explanation.

Out here in the forest, things go on much as usual. About six weeks ago my evening practice was interrupted by the sound of very rapid sub-machine gun fire about a hundred yards away in the forest. Later, we heard that a man from the village had been killed – by whom we don't know. But, the village is full of guns and rogues who I suppose have their own private feuds. Fortunately, they are all afraid of Ven. Ācariya and keep out of the *wat*. In some ways, Thailand is quite a wild country.

I'm enclosing a letter to Jhānananda. I don't know her address and would be glad if you would send it on. I feel rather sorry for her. She has tried to practice the way of Buddhism for a long time, but has twice got attached to bad teachers. I suspect that this may be the *kamma* result of

teaching others in the past before she was fit enough to do so. Perhaps the collapse of her group is a blessing in disguise! But please don't tell her that I said so.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Jhānananda was a Jewish Latvian Nun. She was born in 1895. I think she was ordained in China and spent the war in hiding in the south of France where she learnt tailoring.

I first met her at the Buddhist Society Summer School in 1958. I saw her in the Ladies Room and fled thinking she was a monk what with her shaved head and brown robes. I hadn't really seen her beautiful, soft, serene face or I would have guessed she was a woman.

At that time she was looking after Acharn Paññavaḍḍho in Alexandra Road. We became good friends and my daughter and I loved visiting her in her council flat in later years. It was a bleak building and one reached her room by an iron staircase. She had to share a bathroom, and I am not sure it was even on her floor. But her balcony was covered with plants and she had some beautiful Buddha Rūpas which made her room a haven of peace. She was an extremely good cook.

Jhānananda was very blunt and had no time for deviations from the path. She was always scolding me for my flights of fancy. She saw the first two Noble Truths wherever she looked. When I showed her my first grandchild she said, "What's

so good about that?” Music was just noise to her. She died in 1972. Her obituary makes fascinating reading. I wish I had time to write her life story; perhaps someone else will one day.

Now for the letter: I can’t remember anything about the still centre with the whirlpool effect. It seems, for once, that I had experienced something in my practice that was valuable, but I’m afraid that as soon as you identify something good in your practice and try and explain it to someone else and then hope it will occur again, it never does. I soon learnt that it is better to keep quiet about such things, even to the extent of not discussing it with one’s teacher.

Rereading the letter, I remember being told that the Lord Buddha had much the same thing to contend with, and that seemed to melt the grip this infatuation had on me. It was almost tangible and started me on the road to recovery. It was typical of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa that he could be so kind and gentle when he sensed one was in real trouble. Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho’s advice to learn about the life of the Buddha – not just to read the Suttas – was brilliant because it meant I could build up a strong love and veneration for him which I have never lost. Apart from all the veneration and support lavished on the Buddha, he had much to contend with in his life. His father’s little kingdom was eventually overrun

by warring neighbours after the Buddha had twice prevented it. There were quarrelsome bhikkhus, women demanding to be allowed to become nuns and then he lost two of his closest, dearest disciples in his old age, which he described as being like losing the sun and the moon.

Affection and respect for the Buddha is rather rare in Westerners, so after we moved to Cornwall I started a Sutta reading group to try and remedy that. It never really caught on, the repetitions bored people and they probably only came for the meditation sessions that we began the evening with, and the coffee and dark chocolate and chat afterwards! No harm in that, I enjoyed them too.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

8th September, 1964

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't answered your letter before now, but I've been waiting to talk to Ven. Ācariya about it, and he's been rather unwell so I've had to wait until now.

With regard to your meditation practice, Ven. Ācariya made no comment which generally means that all is OK. The only suggestion which I would make is that you turn your investigations more towards the nature of the body (loathsomeness) than *anicca*, for past experience has tended to show that this is the thing that you should explore first. I have reason to suppose that deep insight into *anicca* can be far more frightening than seeing the nature of the body – unless one's *samādhi* is very strong – for insight into *anicca* 'destroys' the world, both inside and outside, whereas seeing the body just arouses strong disgust.

The thing that you need to increase and develop is wisdom (*paññā*), which means discrimination rather than 'knowledge.' This you may do

by always trying to see the cause/effect relationship in everything that you do. For example, before doing anything, question yourself, “What will be the result of this? Good or bad?” Also, try to discriminate and assess what is of value and what is not.

Now to your ‘problem’: Ven. Ācariya said without any hesitation that it is the wrong way. I questioned him on what was wrong, and he said that it was your attachment to the other party that was wrong. In other words, it is wrong *samādhī*, because the object of concentration is wrong. He said it is like eating a sweet cake with poison in it – the result will be *dukkha*. On the other hand, when the object is right, it’s like the same sweet cake with medicine in it, which is beneficial. “Wrong and right objects” primarily mean external and internal objects; and secondarily, objects leading to passion or cool calmness. Your present state in association with the man in question is like fire, which is sure to lead to heat and to you getting burnt. If you can stop thoughts of this man and have the patience to withstand the resulting *dukkha*, I think you may find before long that, due to your meditation practice, the same state of concentration will develop with an internal object. At present, if you examine closely within yourself, I think you will find a subtle knowing that this condition is not right. You will

find a slight feeling of guilt or inner turbulence (which is probably strongly 'not looked at' by your 'ego') – you may even call it conscience! I suggest that the most suitable object to use is the Buddha. Read about the Buddha and his life often, and try to think about him and what sort of man he was. Use the repetition of *Buddho*, not just as a mere sound, but in the sense of worshipping the Buddha with deep reverence – for the Buddha is truly to be found in the essence of your own heart.

You should also try to examine 'feeling' because practically the whole of your condition is nothing but internal bodily feeling, as are the states of depression that you experience. Your craving there is craving for pleasant feeling, while your dislike of the depression is dislike of unpleasant feeling. You should constantly try to think about, watch and be mindful of feeling, and so become detached from all feeling, thus keeping your heart cool and uninvolved.

There is also the present danger that (despite what you say in your letter) if you go on, this condition will get stronger until it spreads irresistibly into speech and action, leading to the loss of the Dhamma which you have developed in your heart.

I don't think I shall return to England for quite a long time yet, for I'm rather slow and dull at learning the way of meditation – unless the Commies wage war on Thailand, in which case I may have to leave. But, at present, we have the American (or SEATO) army here, so perhaps peace will be maintained.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad
10th September, 1964

Dear Jane,

This letter follows close on the heels of the last one because I've just received yours of the 31st of July. It was rather delayed because you omitted to put 'Thailand' in the address, and it wandered here via Bombay – mindfulness! Also, regarding the address, I'm afraid my writing is rather bad, and you have read the name of our local town wrongly, it should be 'Udon' not 'Udom,' even though the long suffering post office has so far interpreted it correctly.

What you say in your letter is quite interesting, and I'm fairly sure that your best course of action is to make up your mind not to see or contact this man again until you can do so without any feeling of attachment at all. Otherwise, every time you meet him more fuel will be added to the fire: and how can you 'transcend' it in that way? When the fire is out, which will come about by meditation and insight plus plenty of mindfulness, then adding fuel will not matter. As far as the "this is bigger than us both" attitude, that is only true if you give way

to it. But if you are mindful and self-possessed, your *citta* can deal with the situation and you will have the self-control to decide positively to do what is right. This “bigger than both of us” attitude is so often an excuse which one’s *kilesas* and one’s lower nature use to fool one’s wisdom and one’s higher nature so as to make the latter give way and allow the *kilesas* full play to do what they want to do anyway. You should decide firmly that there is nothing inside or outside the universe that is bigger, more important or worth promoting and guarding than your own *citta*. Also, you need to realise that your *citta* is yours entirely and cannot be joined or dissolved in with anyone else’s *citta*. It can, however, be influenced by other people to make you feel and think in certain ways – and this you must guard against. This is very important, for the actions and thoughts of the present can have results ahead in the future. Your best course of action is, as I said before, to develop faith in the Buddha. If you get any *nimittas*, visual or audible, either in meditation or out of it, withdraw from them immediately and set up your heart firmly within your own body.

With regard to *pīti*, there is nothing wrong with it as such, but when attached to an unhealthy state it becomes bad; when attached to a

healthy state it is good. It is like explosives, which are really a neutral power that can be used to blow up rocks or people.

As for this being a “test,” it is. But you should not think in terms of “helping each other through it,” but rather of getting yourself out of it! At present, your *citta* is far from being strong enough or detached enough to help the other party. And to try and get free together with this man will probably lead you both to sink more firmly in the mire. But if you can get free of this attachment, you will then be in a strong position to help the other party – if he wants help. It’s like two people trapped in a bag who cannot help each other unless one or the other can get out of it; then he (or she) can help the other.

It may help you to understand that the true nature of the *citta* is pure and bright like a still pool of clear water, but due to the *kilesas* it becomes disturbed and mixed with muddy defilements. If one can attain a true state of calm for a long time, the disturbance calms down and the mud settles. But while the *kilesas* are active, different parts of one’s nature grab the *citta* and use it for self-expression. In this way the *citta* is grabbed and used to express emotional feelings; or it is grabbed to express thoughts, memories, bodily functions or speech; or it is grabbed by external sensations arising from the six senses – and all of

these disturbances cause *dukkha*. Your present problem is that a part of you has found a way to arouse pleasant feeling, and a certain state of calm and detachment arises because the pleasant feeling enables you to relax. But the very method you use to attain this state is one that will lead to increased disturbance of the *citta*. This is proved by your last letter in which you say that, when this state does not arise, you feel very dissatisfied (*dukkha*). It's like a child who is given a toffee everyday: if one day he doesn't get the toffee, he lets out a hell of a wail. But if he had never tasted the toffee to begin with, he would be quite satisfied to go without it.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

17th September, 1964

Dear Jane,

I was very glad to receive your letter of the 10th of September, for it looks now as though all your immediate problems should subside. I asked Ven. Ācariya about the states of practice which you described, and he said straight away that you had attained *samatha* (calm), i.e. *samādhī*. This is a very important step, for it is the basis on which you can develop wisdom (*paññā*). Ven. Ācariya said that the important thing now is to guard this state by avoiding anything which may break in (emotionally) and disturb it. He also said that you should try to gradually increase the amount of meditation practice you do and try to attain this state again and again until it becomes easy and strong. This state can deteriorate, but it won't as long as you guard it well. On the other hand, it can develop further; but you must not be anxious for its development, nor fear its deterioration. Just go on doing the practice and lead a normal 'urbane' sort of life without excitement or worries.

Ven. Ācariya said that there is no need at present to investigate much in the direction of *vipassanā*. But if your mind turns naturally to investigation, then let it go that way – but don't force it. The main thing now is to become strong in *samādhi* and to maintain the 'matter of fact' tone of your normal life (which is a very good way to describe a state of calm). A few words of caution: don't try teaching or telling others about this state yet. I don't mean that you mustn't talk about it to anyone; though, generally, the less said the better. I tell you this because people are curious and may ask questions. Also, don't agree to give talks or lectures on Buddhism to any group of people unless you can't refuse, and then keep strictly to the 'party line.' And don't write any articles on Buddhism. All these sorts of things can be very disturbing and a danger to your practice. All being well, the time will come when you can do all these things quite safely with benefit to all – but not yet.

Yes, of course, a good relationship can be developed with your man friend, but I would suggest that you first make your *samādhi* strong and fix in place that 'matter of fact' feeling, then your friendship can be true and genuine without any taint of passion.

One further thing Ven. Ācariya said, "Don't think of the past, neither its failures nor successes, but keep to the present."

No, I can't rebuke you for the use of the word 'self': but do keep an intellectual reservation that you are using the word to describe certain experiences. And keep in mind that there is much work for you to do yet in destroying the *kilesas*, and that you've got to find out a great many things before you know the whole story about how true the word 'self' is. That includes knowing the full meaning of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*.

I don't know Simone Weil's book, but if you would like to send me a copy I would be glad to receive it. One important point to keep in mind: don't fall into the view that Buddhism is the same as Christianity. Where *samatha* is concerned, there are many similarities. But they diverge quite radically when *paññā* is reached, for the aims of the two are different.

I wonder if you would try and get a book for me. It's called 'A *Comparative Pratimoksha*' by Pachow. I think Luzacs are the only people who will know about it, for it's printed by some odd publisher. It may, of course, be long out of print and unobtainable; and if so, it doesn't matter much.

I am glad that Freda is coming to stay with you. Venerable Ācariya has said that if he knew English well-enough, he would go to England now to help you and Freda in meditation.

Out here, we are coming to the end of the rains (I think) and the cicadas have started making a hell of a screech at night. Otherwise, all is peaceful and normal.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Sadly, I can't find anything in my notebooks about this improvement in my practice. Even with that, I see that I was trying to justify remaining friends with the man who had caused me so much misery; in fact, we never did meet again. Nevertheless, after enduring that 'rhinoceros' in my mind (as one senior Acharn described it), it must have been such a relief to have it transformed into a gentle biddable lap dog. Even though, as Acharn Paññā said, I had only acquired the calm mind necessary for the work to start, it seemed momentous to me.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

1st February, 1965

Dear Jane,

Your old well house sounds as though it may be quite a useful place to stay when Venerable Ācariya decides to visit England. I am fairly sure that he won't want to hang about London all the time, so one or two quiet places in the country may prove very valuable. He has said that he is not interested in teaching masses of people in England; he only wants to teach the few who could truly benefit from what he has to say. Of course, as you probably realise by now, the main help he gives to his followers can be done at any distance and without words. But his presence there may act as something of a catalyst to some of the good people who are more or less drifting on the fringe of Buddhist affairs in England. And his personal help through the medium of talking can also be invaluable to those, like yourself, whose practice is beyond the initial stages. I told him about your offer and also the offer to pay his fare, and he wants me to thank you for both. However, he says please don't send

any cash to Thailand unless he gives the word, for out here he has a lot of good supporters who would be only too happy to make merit in this way. I am sure they would get him a Rolls Royce if he would accept it – he wouldn't, of course!

With regard to your query about Venerable Ācariya's 'following the cow' simile, you say, "Should one not refocus one's attention on the awareness of the cow, or *nimitta*, with each change of breath?" Venerable Ācariya says that you've understood the simile wrongly, for the cow is not the *nimitta*, but the *citta* in a state of full absorption. The breath and *nimitta* are just the 'footprints' you see before seeing the cow. Venerable Ācariya also said that you may certainly start developing *vipassanā*; but first, you must attain full absorption, or *samādhi* – which as you say happens fairly often now – and hold it for a long time (as long as you can). When you emerge from *samādhi*, examine your own physical body, viewing it as a whole and in its parts: as loathsome, *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*; as something of this world and not you or yours; or in any other suitable way you feel like examining the body. Venerable Ācariya is very pleased with the time you are spending

on practice, and he said he would always try to help anyone who puts forward effort in the way you are doing. He is primarily impressed by what people are and what they do, and he doesn't go much on what they say. He prefers action rather than talk.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Unfortunately, the well house was no longer available for Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa to use when he eventually visited England in June 1974. We moved to Cornwall in March of that year and had not yet found the farmhouse which was to become our home for 27 years.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

25th May, 1965

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't written for a long time, but I've been away in Bangkok and have had too many things to do otherwise. You may have heard from Freda, whom I wrote to about a week ago, that an offer has been made, by a wealthy but anonymous person, to pay all expenses for you and Freda to come out here to this *wat* for a period of about a month (or more). The best time to come would be between October and March. From March to July is too hot, and the rains (July to October) are very difficult as the road is virtually impassable and the monastery is full for the rains retreat. Before doing anything further, I would like to know how you feel about this first. I haven't yet talked to the Venerable Ācariya about it, as I would like to know first how you are fixed. I think he may well suggest that it would be best to come next year (in about 18 months), because his English will have improved considerably and Pat Wilkinson, who is now here as an *upāsikā*, should be speaking good Thai by then.

While in Bangkok, I was re-ordained into the Dhammayut Nikāya. Previously, I was ordained in the Mahā Nikāya, which is the larger of the two Nikāyas (monastic orders) in Thailand. This monastery is a Dhammayut *wat* which means that previously I could not take part in some of the Saṅgha functions. It does not however mean that there's any difference in so far as teaching and external things like robes, etc. are concerned. In fact, one cannot tell which are Dhammayut monks or Dhammayut *wats* in Thailand and which are Mahā Nikāya by any obvious external differences.

Thanks for sending the book *Le Divin Milieu*. I have now read it but, generally speaking, can't agree with his ideas. I suppose that this book is not contrary to the Catholic doctrine, for although it does not say *nihil obstat*, it seems to have the blessing of one or two other *seigneurs*. As such, it shows very clearly that the way of Christianity and the way of Buddhism are not the same and do not lead to the same goal. On pages 103 and 104, he suggests that Christianity is a process of steady ascent, both individually and en masse, towards God. But the Buddhist criticism of this view is that, however high one ascends, one is still in *samsāra* – and even if one 'reaches God,' the Devil is still there

somewhere below. In other words, however strange and wonderful the things experienced on the ascent are, they are fundamentally impermanent and are still bound up with the *kilesas*, however subtle. This dualism of good and evil, perfection and imperfection, high and low, etc. seems to be fundamental to Christian doctrine. Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches that these things are only important stages for one who is still training but that the goal, Nibbāna, is completely different. Nibbāna is neither high nor low, nor can one compare it to anything in *saṃsāra* nor to *saṃsāra* itself, for its nature is a complete break with *saṃsāra* and the ways of *saṃsāra*. I suppose the nearest analogy is that of space, for although we talk of objects occupying space, the space is unaffected by the objects and is there just the same whether the objects are there or not. Again, Christianity talks of a progressive ascent, whereas Buddhism speaks of the Middle Way. I am becoming more and more convinced that by adhering to the Christian doctrine, a Christian can never attain Nibbāna, precisely because their fundamental view is not leading in that direction. This is not to say that Christians are not good people. I think that some of

them can attain *samādhi* quite easily, but they then meet an enormous obstacle when they come to develop *paññā* within their own doctrine. It is constantly said in Buddhism that only *paññā* leads to Nibbāna. *Samādhi* is a useful tool; using the tool is the job of *paññā* – but it must be used in the right way.

Getting back to the book *Le Divin Milieu*: the idea that the whole world is purposeful and is progressing may be a ‘nice idea,’ but facts don’t seem to bear this out. In fact, it seems more probable that the world is just a purposeless process of cause and effect (*kamma* in action), and degeneration seems to be more in accordance with what we can see in the world of man. But this again comes back to the basic Christian idea of linear progress towards an ultimate state, as opposed to the fundamental Indian idea of a cyclic process of development – degeneration – development, ad infinitum. You must make a choice of which one seems more probable, for there is little or no evidence that tells us which is right – although there isn’t any likelihood that the idea of linear progress will help you pull out the ‘arrow’ of the *kilesas*.

With regard to your becoming aware of the area at the base of the throat, Venerable Ācariya said that anywhere within the body was

alright, but it is probably best to keep to the heart most of the time. As to whether your character is *lobha*, *dosa* or *moha*, I generally don't like telling people this unless their characteristics are very clear-cut. It is so easy for a person to pick on one of these three, such as *lobha*, and to think "I am a *lobha* type." That person then tends to interpret all his actions, etc. in terms of *lobha*, forgetting that his mind is pervaded by *dosa* and *moha* also. In other words, in any given length of time, there are periods when *lobha* is predominant and periods when *dosa* and *moha* are predominant. In the case of a *lobha* character, greed is present more frequently and for longer periods than the other two. As such, the best thing you can do is to use mindfulness to see for yourself when and for how long each of these three arises – after lengthy observation you will know for yourself. But you must not forget that the issue is further complicated by those times when wholesome characteristics are present and *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* are mainly absent.

I am finished working on the translation of Venerable Ācariya's book and am sending a draft copy to Philip Badley in the hope that he has a device with which to make a couple of copies for you and Freda. The English still needs a lot of correcting and there are no footnotes yet,

but I doubt whether that will bother you much. When it is finished, we hope it will be printed in the Wheel Series in Ceylon.

Out here, the rains have started early and the weather is alternately hot and wet, and generally not very pleasant.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Freda had sensibly waited to hear from me before discussing the generous offer of our fares to Thailand, which I heard directly from Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho. I can clearly remember I was sitting at the kitchen table having a morning cup of coffee with the sun streaming in when I read of that amazing news. I told Ian about it at lunch and he seemed quite happy for me to go. He had met Freda and liked her. They discovered he had been at prep school with her brother. He said that, meanwhile, he would take the opportunity to visit his father and brothers and sister in Australia.

Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho makes some interesting comments about the differences between Christianity and Buddhism, saying their aims are entirely different. I wish I could have discussed it with him, but he wasn't one for discussions! Having spent a lot of my childhood with my father's sister and her husband who was a vicar in Sussex – both of whom I adored – I was always trying to find similarities because I knew how much it hurt them when I became a Buddhist.

I do agree with the Acharn that there is very little evidence of developmental progress in the world; in fact, just the opposite. The destruction of this beautiful

planet by overpopulation is accelerating at an alarming rate. When one adds to that the effects of global warming, soon nothing will be left but synthetics. We see children walking round with plastic dummies in their mouths, old people being given little robots to keep them company and virtual reality shows at cinemas. It's really quite frightening; but also an incentive to practice hard.

The first English translation of a Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa *desanā* was printed in the book *Wisdom Develops Samādhi*. It was obviously written by someone who had actually put the Buddha's teaching into practice. I found it very helpful. Like many Westerners I was finding it difficult to maintain calm for any length of time because it was so hard to stop my thinking. I understood Tan Acharn to be saying that investigating the causes of the thoughts will make them gradually fade away. It was a revolutionary idea. All the other teachers seem to say just the opposite: that you must make the mind calm through concentration before you can start developing wisdom. Some clench their teeth and do it by sheer force, and sometimes that way is necessary. But I find that too much concentration leads to a rigid, inflexible mind which makes it difficult to adapt to changing circumstances. I expect that is why the Buddha called his teaching the Middle Way. You have to use all sorts of different methods to get round the obstacles that

most people are faced with on their path to freedom. Provided, of course, you stay on the path and keep within the boundaries composed of right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

Without the help of Acharn Paññā I might well have strayed off course. But a teacher who has actually put the teaching into practice and been successful is invaluable. And now I was about to meet such a one in Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, or Luangta as he was later to be called.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

31st May, 1965

Dear Jane,

This is in reply to your letter of the 16th of May and so, follows close on the heels of my previous letter. In regard to your comments about your practice, Venerable Ācariya says that first of all you must not overdo it and become too fatigued. He said you must follow the Middle Way and look after both your body and your *citta*. If you don't look after your body enough – either by not giving it enough rest or food – it can become a hindrance to your development, and even illness may arise. Venerable Ācariya was otherwise in agreement with the way your practice is developing, but he is very concerned that you have reached a point where you need a teacher more than at any previous stage. He even asked how long it would take to fly to England, and would he be able to stay for about ten days.

He is very concerned that you should not listen to the advice and teaching of anyone who has not actually gone through your experiences and the stages of practice which you have reached,

however learned he or she may be. This is because such advice, although it may be good Dhamma, may well prove a hindrance to you, thus causing a lot of difficulties later on. He said it's like a doctor who, if he's not skilled enough, may give his patient the wrong medicine. The medicine itself is perfectly good, but unless it's suited to the patient's disease, it may well do more harm than good. Dhamma teachings are like this too. As such, I suggest that you don't listen to the advice of anyone in England, either in the Saṅgha or out of it, for I am very doubtful whether a good 'doctor' can be found anywhere in the West – let alone England. In fact, there are very few good ones out here!

I asked Venerable Ācariya whether you should come out here for a visit before the rains retreat. He said that it is not that essential unless you have some real doubts in your practice that need immediate clarification. But he would like you to try to come out after the rains retreat (about July to October), and also Freda if she can make it. It would be well worth your while to come if only for about ten days, but of course the longer the better. As I said in my previous letter, the air fare is no particular problem.

With regard to that offer: the money for the ticket would likely be deposited with a travel agency (probably American Express), and all

you would have to do is get your passport and a visa from the Thai Embassy (tourist visa for a month if possible) and then decide on a plane and contact the travel agency. When you arrive, you would be met by one of Venerable Ācariya's supporters (a doctor) who would fix up everything at this end. I hope you and Freda can come, but it is most important that you should meet Venerable Ācariya before long.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

The following four letters are all about travel arrangements and I will just pick out the parts of general interest.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

4th July, 7th August, 3rd Oct and 16th October 1965

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letters. I have spoken to Venerable Ācariya and he says 24th October would be alright, although I must warn you that there may still be floods on the roads between Udon and the monastery and you may have to travel the last three or four miles in a bullock cart. But I imagine that this will not worry you unduly.

With regards to arrangements for coming out, Tan Acharn has said that it would be best to use the doctor's name as guarantor for your visa. There is no difficulty in getting a visitor's visa anyway, it's only the 'permission to stay' once you have arrived that is slightly difficult. They normally give permission for only a fortnight, at the end of which the visa must be renewed; whereas we want to arrange for a stay of one month. I suggest that you say you are coming out for reasons of tourism and studying Buddhism as the Thais are keen to promote tourism. With regard to the cost, I have been in touch with the person concerned and he says please don't worry about your trip to Australia; he says he

will pay for your return fare to Thailand and if you want to go on to Australia it makes no difference.

With regard to your benefactor, I have been told that he wants to remain completely anonymous. He says that if in any way you do happen to find out who he is, please don't tell anyone. He has become very keen to help the Saṅgha, and particularly those who are followers of Venerable Ācariya, and any of the other good teachers in Thailand. He has become very disillusioned where money is concerned. He has found out that it is easy to become evil or selfish with money, but it's not easy to truly do good with it. So the opportunity of using it in a truly good way to help others is a chance for him to make merit. In fact, he said that if after coming here you want to come again, say next year, he will help you to come.

I know all this about large sums of cash will probably seem almost unbelievable to you (and Freda), but people out here take the business of making merit very seriously, and particularly so where they feel that the people concerned are truly practising the way of Buddhism under a really qualified teacher. Many of them have also seen that however much money or goods one has, one can't take it along once the physical body comes to an end.

One or two small points that you should consider. In the Wat there are no chairs to sit on; we all sit on the floor. Unless one is used to it, this can become rather painful on the knees, ankles and hips after a while. The polite sitting posture for a lady is with the lower legs both pointing in one direction (right or left), one must not use the cross-legged posture (i.e., the polite posture is like the cross legged posture, but with one leg turned outwards instead of inwards). I suggest that you practice sitting like this for a bit to get used to it. When you are in your own hut, however, you can sit as you please.

I suggest that you bring some anti-malaria pills with you. 'Aralen' is a suitable type and should be available in England. I think that's all for the moment; other things I will let you know about in due course, such as local customs and things to bring with you, etc. With regard to language, it's no use learning any Thai – there just isn't time. But you may usefully swot up some of the technical Buddhist terms in Pāli, such as a selection from Ñāṇatiloka's Buddhist Dictionary, for Venerable Ācariya knows Pāli, and it would help a lot in translating with Venerable Ācariya.

I almost forgot – thanks very much for the parcel of writing paper, envelopes, etc. and also for the money which you gave Robert for my use.

You will certainly be met at Don Muang airport, but whether by the doctor or who, I don't yet know. Tan Acharn was talking the other day as though there may be quite a reception committee. Don't book anywhere to stay as Tan Acharn's followers will fix all this up; in fact, they will probably invite you to stay in one of their homes for the time that you have to stay in Bangkok. Please don't bring a mosquito net, for we have loads of them here, and wherever you go they are almost sure to provide one for you. As to the Japanese cushion, if it is something special then bring it by all means, but we have plenty of ordinary cushions and pillows in the Wat. Although at night it is quite useful, during the day a cushion is a bit hot to sit on.

I suggest that when you get to Bangkok that you buy some anti-mosquito lotion; the best is called KIK, made by Geigy in Switzerland, but it's easily available in Bangkok. Also bring some Entero-vioform in case the jungle diet doesn't suit you. You will probably be given some quite good food here – and plenty, for there's no shortage of food in Thailand. But sometimes the villagers give us roasted frogs (rather tasteless), flying ants (oily) and young bees still in the comb (quite good). It may be worth your while to bring also a bottle of water purifying pills. Our water mainly comes out of a well and we never boil

it. So far there doesn't seem to have been any cases of typhoid in the Wat, but it's a little hazardous nonetheless. A few vitamin pills may be of value also, but you could get the doctor's advice on this when you arrive. Also, if you would like it, I suggest you bring out some tea with you. We have tea here, but it's all China tea and some of it is not very good.

I would be interested to read an account of your 'copy-book' practice at Henham, but please don't try to get it translated into Thai. The average Thai person would make a most awful mess of translating it, mainly because, although they know their own language, they don't know the language of Dhamma. It is far easier for an English speaking Thai person to translate to Tan Acharn, with myself to explain the English to the translator. Tan Acharn laughed when I told him that you were knocking the pride down with the *ti-lakkhana*; and he fully approved of your description of the four *dhātu* (elements).

The weather is rather unpleasant now – hot and rainy. My four *dhātu* are affected by changes in weather and I often feel that I have no energy left. Well, it's certainly good for the practice of patience.

P.S. I don't imagine that you will be given frog's legs to eat – but we sometimes get them in our bowls.

Thanks for your two letters. The Thai visa incidentally only covers the entry into Thailand and not how long you stay here. The length of your stay is dealt with after you arrive. The doctor will be too busy to help you when you arrive; as such would you use the professor's name as your guarantor. All this more or less covers what I wrote to Freda a few days back, but I repeat it just in case her letter went astray. One further thing, would you or Freda write to the professor thanking him for his help; he is a very good supporter of Venerable Ācariya, and he (Venerable Ācariya) says it would be good to make personal contact as he might offer to put you up at his home. One thing I must warn you of: Venerable Ācariya has told a lot of people about your gains in meditation to try and arouse their faith and energy (the unsaid meaning being: "If she can do this 7,000 miles away in England, without anyone present to help her, why can't you do a lot better?"). I couldn't ask Tan Acharn to have the Maṅgala Sutta chanted for Tanya, as we rarely do any chanting. Being a *kammaṭṭhāna wat*, we don't do the morning and evening chanting.

Thanks for your offering of help. Perhaps you could get me Gurdieff's book (I believe he wrote only one, but if there are more, I leave it you to decide on the most suitable). Also, could you find out something about the Tibetan Monastery in Yorkshire; there was a bit about it in the *Buddhist* some while ago.

Finally, the Canadian monk (Phra⁶ Cherry is what we call him – Cherry is actually his surname – his ordained name is Abhiceto) thinks that I ought to let you know that Tan Acharn chews betel nut; otherwise your English sensibilities may be shocked! I told him I reckoned it would take more than that to shock you, but now you won't even be surprised.

I don't expect I shall write again unless there is something special and look forward to seeing you at the end of the month.

Yours,

Paññā

6. Phra (*Thai*: พระ) means Bhikkhu.

*Jane's Recollections on her first visit to
Wat Pa Baan Taad
October to November, 1965*

I arrived in Bangkok on the evening of Wednesday, the 27th of October 1965. I had no trouble with immigration, but the customs man embarrassed me by going through all my personal possessions ignoring the letter written by Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho.

On the bus to the airport building I was given a note saying a Miss Ketsuich would be meeting me, which was reassuring. And there she was – a diminutive figure in a blue dress who spoke perfect English. Also in the welcoming party were Robert Exell, an old friend of Freda's from Oxford who was a professor at the Asia Institute of Technology whose wife was Thai, and Dr. Ouay and his wife Khun Ying Songsri. They were the great supporters of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa who had offered to take us up to the Wat. They enquired after the flight and seemed delighted to see me. Poor Freda arrived two hours late. Nobody knew her flight number, or its arrival time, and they ended up meeting every flight but the right one.

We didn't linger as they all looked exhausted. Robert then whisked me off in his smart little car for the long drive into Bangkok. There was no air conditioning in those days and the heat and humidity were stifling. The road was good but it seemed to be full of playing children who were difficult to see in the dark. There was no squalor and no overpowering smells. Freda was waiting for me in the garden of a charming Christian guest house, much cheaper than the Swiss one I had booked into. We sat in the garden and drank sweet fizzy drinks out of a bottle. I put my religion as Buddhist on the guest form and hoped we wouldn't be thrown out as the notice in my room said the hotel was run for Christian Missionaries!

Robert picked us up in the morning and we then collected an English monk, Bhikkhu Khantipalo, from Wat Bovornives in Bangkok. We lunched with Sulak Sivaraksa, a most charming person who edited the Thai equivalent of The New Statesman. Quite a party.

Saturday 30th October

The day we arrived in Udon Thani, Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, accompanied by two attendants, was actually standing on the main road on the outskirts of the town waiting to greet us. After we piled out of the van, I managed to make rather a fool

of myself by doing the prostrations I had been practising, right there by the side of the road with the traffic roaring by. Nobody else did and I was told to “get up, get up.” We all then proceeded to a supporter’s house in the middle of the town. We were shown into a spotless bathroom where we were able to wash our hands and face, using water which we got out of urns using a dipper.

Tan Acharn then held court in a large room. All the bhikkhus were sitting in a line with their right sides towards him while the lay people sat opposite him. As people came in, they bowed to him three times. Tan Acharn fired questions at Khun Ying Sermsri, who translated them to us. Eventually, the three of us and Sam, an American missionary who had joined the party at some point, set off in the dark with all our luggage in two jeeps. Tan Acharn came and personally checked that our things were safely stowed. We bounced over a bumpy road through a village of wooden huts on stilts from which loud music blared. We splashed through a couple of fords and drove along the edge of what seemed to be a dam until we came to a wide river where we had to stop. There we waited until a long canoe turned up to take us over to the further bank.

Freda and Sam and the two bhikkhus set off first. Tan Acharn meanwhile taught Pat, the English Nun, and me a few Thai words! *Nam* – นาม (with a long a) for

thorn, *Nam* – น้ำ (with a short a) for water. *Lor* – ล้อ for wheel. Then we took off with Tan Acharn sitting in the bow of the canoe. The silence came rushing towards us, the first real silence since the Australian dawn – and practically the last – since I discovered that the sub-tropical forest was incredibly noisy.

When we reached the further shore, Tan Acharn said we could wait for the bullock carts or we could walk. We decided to walk, a distance of two to three miles I should think. Tan Acharn led with a torch walking at a cracking pace, with the two bhikkhus bringing up the rear. We padded through Baan Taad village. We could see shadowy figures, still up, sitting on verandas raised above the ground. We crossed a little bridge and onto monastery land. After a quarter of a mile the path led us up to the huge open *sālā* or meeting hall. There were no gates or fences in those days.

At the bottom of the steps was a big water urn with a scoop made from half a coconut shell attached to a stick. Tan Acharn poured water over his feet and we did the same, heavenly and cool. We had been walking with bare feet most of the time as the paths were sandy.

The hall was a huge expanse of shining teak on two levels. Tan Acharn's cushions were set on the left and behind him was an iron grille obviously hiding the

Buddha Rūpa. The hall was dark except for pools of light from oil lamps; figures of bhikkhus could be dimly seen moving about. We peered to see if one of them was Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho, and Tan Acharn noticing, said he would come presently.

We all bowed three times and were ushered to some straw mats on the left just below where Tan Acharn was sitting. There were bottles of drinking water with gay paper stoppers like butterflies and drinking glasses. A bhikkhu came around with mugs and a huge iron kettle filled with very sweet and strong black cocoa, which was delicious and restorative.

The grille was pushed back to reveal candles lit in front of a large golden Buddha. Acharn Paññā arrived and we watched him across the hall doing seven prostrations. He came and sat opposite us with Phra Cherry. We all beamed and we were asked about the journey and if all the arrangements had worked. Then Tan Acharn gave a lot of instructions about our life there which Acharn Paññā translated. He told us to make quite sure any valuable possessions were safely hidden away and advised locking up when we left the hut. He told us to watch out for snakes and to take our medicines! He showed great concern for our comfort and safety.

Eventually, we were taken down to the hut in the nuns' area of the monastery

which we were all going to share. Khun Ying Songsri, Dr. Ouay's wife, had been allowed to have it built for her visits to the monastery.

Unbelievably, it had its own little blue-tiled bathroom – a most unexpected luxury not to be repeated until my very last visits to the monastery, 50 years later! The three of us rigged up our mosquito nets side by side. It seemed a very long time since we had left Bangkok that morning!

Trays of delicious food were brought down to us the next morning. We sat and ate on the floor of the veranda. It was about nine o'clock, and it would be our only meal of the day.

The hut was made of a tough, dark, red wood and raised on stilts. A sawed off log of wood served as a step. The roof was thatched. The windows had wooden shutters, but no glass or netting, and looked on to a path at the back. In the distance was a clump of tall daisy-type flowers of a deep curry yellow colour, the colour of the monks' robes. These were the first things I saw when I opened my eyes in the morning. The hut was surrounded by tall jungle trees festooned with creepers.

We decided to meditate at night and rest during the day. A constant stream of villagers came around to inspect us. It was a relief to hear from Pat that the *kilesas*

are supposed to come up in a situation like that. Therefore, the fact that I couldn't meditate and was full of ill will was quite normal. As far as I could tell, all our usual characteristics were getting exaggerated: Pat more fussy, Freda more bossy and me more irritated. My mind was thin, jumpy and unsteady and my threshold of pain very low. I really felt I had gone back to the beginning again. The rest of the party arrived sometime later that day, at which time we were summoned to the *sālā* where we had a rather alarming interview with Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa.

We were questioned about our practice in front of the whole community. I apparently said something rather boastful and was told that I still had quite a lot to learn, at which everyone laughed. But we then received a wonderful teaching, one which I have never forgotten. "There is no need for fear – the *citta* never dies." He told Freda and me that we had an 80% chance of complete success or an absolute chance of 80% success, provided we made the effort! This was very encouraging at a time when both of us were struggling a bit for different reasons. Of course, he didn't say how long this was going to take! Perhaps many lifetimes. But at least he thought we would be on the path.

The next day after an almost sleepless night I decided to go out with my camera and photograph the bhikkhus coming back from their almsround. I found the

area surrounding the *sālā* filled with local people all dressed in their Sunday best. They were lined up in a great circle offering food to the bhikkhus, who filed by in order of seniority, led by the charming and elderly Tan Chao Khun Dhammacinta, the abbot of a Wat in Bangkok.

Their bowls very soon became full, so they were tipped and emptied into huge basins carried by laymen. All the food went up to the *sālā* to be blessed by Tan Acharn. It was then given out to the monks and resident lay people. What was left over went back to the village. A pity something like that can't be devised for our monasteries in the West, where so much food appears to go to waste.

We didn't have any food with us to offer the monks, but the kind Ouays let us '*sai bat*'⁷ some of theirs. We then washed our feet and went up into the *sālā* to watch the bhikkhus doing their amazing act of distributing all the food as Tan Acharn presided over them and occasionally gave directions. Their mindfulness was so good, they never collided with each other – it was like watching a ballet. I never tired of seeing this and made a point to go up to the *sālā* every morning while I was there. During subsequent visits, after Tan Acharn had become famous, busloads of people came every day with food offerings, and it was an

7. Sai bat (ใส่บาตร): offering food to a monk (bhikkhu).

amazing feat the way the food would all be sorted out so that everyone there received food.

On that day, the visiting Chao Khun started the blessing with all the monks joining in while we sat with joined palms. The monks waited until Tan Acharn started to eat before they did. They ate with their fingers with great dexterity. We then retired to eat our meal, walking down to our *kuṭi* with Sam, the missionary. The Thai children crouched down with joined palms as we passed, something they are taught to do to grown-ups, both bhikkhus and lay.

Our breakfasts were pleasant, chatty occasions. The two men, Sam and Douglas Burns, were an interesting pair. Sam was unbelievably intuitive; and Douglas was extremely knowledgeable about all things concerning medicine or parapsychology or the Dhamma. After a short kip on my straw mat, I found the practice went so much better.

In the evening we had a very interesting interview with the head nun, Khun Mae Kaew, as we called her. (Her biography, *Mae Chee Kaew*, was written in 2009 by the Venerable Acharn Dick Silaratano). Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa had been her teacher and asked her to come and be a companion to his mother when he set up his forest monastery at Baan Taad village near Udon Thani. Khun Mae Kaew

planted fruit trees and so was able to supply the monastery with paw paws, pineapples, passion fruit and lemons.

If anyone in the village wanted some, she would give the fruit to them for free. She had a huge lime tree by her *kuṭi* and sent some down to us every day. I found her limes tasted particularly good with paw paw. She told us her story, which was translated for us by Khun Ying Sermsri: When she was 19 years old, Tan Acharn Mun came to her village on *tudong* and gave a talk on the value of meditation. She and two others decided to try using *buddho* as a *kammaṭṭhāna*. Once while she was practising, she had a vision of herself dying, and saw her body after it was dead. When she woke up she realised that everything that happened to her was a result of her past deeds and because of that nothing could happen that she didn't deserve. With that realization she lost all fear. She continued to practise diligently until Acharn Mun departed the area. Before he left he insisted that she stop practising meditation and instead live a normal village life. She later married a devout Buddhist. They had no children but eventually adopted a little girl. After twelve years of marriage, she ordained as a nun at her local Wat for three months – just as Acharn Mun had predicted she would. She then returned home for one night and told her husband and relatives that she was leaving home for good. They tried to hold her back, but to no avail. She then lived as a nun quite alone in

the forest for 8 years. She said she saw many tigers of every size, but they always ran away. She had even trod on snakes sometimes by mistake, but they had never bit her. She said she had no fear because she knew that when it was time for her body to die, it would do so – but not before.

Khun Mae Kaew said she didn't consider going to visit Acharn Mun at his Wat because she felt she had nothing to give him in return for his teaching. It was interesting for me to hear that because that was what I was feeling too, staying in the Wat Pa Baan Taad. We were given so much, not only in the way of Dhamma teaching, but all we had received from the good lay people who did so much for us. So much that we wondered what we could we give in return.

Saturday 6th November

Tan Acharn really started putting the pressure on us that day. We had been there nearly a week. That day we were called up to meet him in the *sālā* twice. The morning interview was very short, but the afternoon one went better. We both reported having rather frightening dreams. Tan Acharn's response was that there was no room for self-pity in Buddhism. We were warriors and we had to bravely face the results of our *kamma* with strong hearts. We still had a lot of hard work to

do. He told Freda that she would progress very quickly once she achieved good results in meditation, and that she could gain the ability to see into the past and into the future, which would be very valuable. He said again that he was full of hope for both of us, provided that we did the work. He said that he looked on us both as his close disciples, and that distance made no difference in the Dhamma. He finished by saying, “There, that was a good meeting!”

In the evening we all went up to the *sālā* yet again. This time Tan Acharn was to give a talk on *anattā* (not-self). The air seemed to be electric with anticipation and we were all very still on our side of the hall. The lights were dimmed except for one candle at the end of the hall.

Tan Acharn began very softly, his voice barely audible. As we meditated while he spoke, his voice rose in intensity and then gradually faded away. It was a tremendous experience, and I expect we absorbed some of the meaning even though we couldn’t understand the words. There was a wonderful feeling of goodwill and *mettā* at the end. Khun Ying Sermsri came over and translated the gist of the Dhamma talk for us. Her trained legal mind was a great asset. Tan Acharn cast his spell that night; after that I hardly saw him again.

That night we became aware of the bombing raids. The Vietnam War was just

starting and there was a big American air base in Udon Thani. Planes seemed to be roaring overhead all night long, and we could hear explosion after explosion. Although I was very frightened, I tried to be detached about the fear. I discovered the fear was like a hard knot in the abdomen, which eventually dissolved when I concentrated on it.

The next day the Ouay party left, the ladies travelling in bullock carts. Tan Acharn was there to see them off, with Tan Paññā, while the rest of the monks were out on almsround. We all felt sad to see them go. Well, it was time to get back to work. I decided I was going to concentrate on seeing how the body was composed of the four elements, which were part of the world. To call the body mine and cling to it would only cause pain, as it was ruled by forces quite out of my control. My body arose out of the elements, was sustained by the elements, and would return to the elements.

Wednesday 10th November

The village had a celebration in the night which seemed to go on until dawn, with loudspeakers blaring and music playing. Insect bites were driving me mad;

I am afraid I had scratched them until they bled. I found I could deal with the pain in my legs by finding the most painful spots, concentrating on them and asking who it was that felt the pain. For a while the pain eased, but there were so many hurting parts it was exhausting following them all around. I decided it was probably a question of accustoming the body to sit for long periods. I did have an excellent review afterwards imagining the body breaking up and disintegrating.

Thursday 11th November (my 40th Birthday)

I was rather puzzled and hurt by the reply I got to my, admittedly rather emotional, offer of love and devotion to Tan Acharn, which I felt was all I had to give. He replied, "Very good, but don't have the mistaken impression that it will do me any good!" A rat pinched the soap out of the bathroom that morning, and I saw my first snake, apparently a very dangerous one, exactly the colour of the sand – a little slip of a thing.

Not a particularly good start to the day, but I was happier than I had been for a long time. I felt I had been only half awake up until then. Everything had relaxed and gone back to normal. Khun Mae (Tan Acharn's mother) had a little family

gathering round her *kuṭi*, which was just next door to ours. People were laughing and chatting again. I sent out a telepathic appeal for another eiderdown and of course it arrived in the evening. I thought, “Oh dear, if they can pick up my thoughts, like a request for an eiderdown, what can they have made of all the horrors that have been going through my mind lately.” The place seemed like a single living body with Tan Acharn at the heart.

Saturday 13th November

Tan Acharn left the Wat this evening. A supporter was dying in Bangkok. I was desolate but found a beautiful white orange blossom on my veranda which Khun Boon, one of the nuns, had probably put there to comfort me.

Sunday 14th November

The little dog that turns up from time to time brought her puppy and left it with us to play with while she went around the Wat looking for food. She returned in due course and took the puppy home. Then Khun Mae’s cat came and lay on the

veranda. I felt very honoured. It was touching that even the animals were trying to cheer me up. Khun Mae Kaew sent extra limes!

So the days went by, bringing lots of memories of things that I had done in the past that I was ashamed of, as well as times when people were unkind to me. I was able to accept the painful feelings and tried to understand the causes that brought them about, and thus, I hoped, laid them to rest. I had some good insights too. If only I could be mindful perhaps these bad patterns of behaviour would eventually wear away.

The nuns were a wonderful example: they went about their tasks wholeheartedly, they had low voices and laughed a lot but in a quiet way, and they seemed so uncomplicated compared with us. Khun Boon came over with a box of crackers this morning. I asked who had sent them and she pointed to herself.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November, 1965

Dear Jane,

Just a brief note to say it sounds as though your practice is going the right way, though I don't like to comment on it much when Tan Acharn is the teacher. In addition, your practice seems to go somewhat differently from mine, and I'm still far from being skilled at *samādhi*.

I am returning the cash with one of the boys, and please don't send any cash to me as we are not allowed to touch or keep it. I am sending some air letter forms, no need to pay for them, or the stamps – I don't quite know who you could pay anyway.

No, don't tip the boys. Tan Acharn would not approve. When they do work, such as cutting the forest or repairing the road, Tan Acharn gets one of the lay people to pay them. He's very generous too, for they do work hard.

It's a pity Tan Acharn had to go to Bangkok just now, but he had to because one of his followers is ill, and he teaches that a teacher must look after his followers as a mother would her children.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November, 1965

Dear Jane,

About your return journey: in case Tan Acharn cannot return before you go, we have arranged things (Tan Acharn told us to). Khun Ayakhan will come with his jeep to take you to Udon (a rough ride I fear), and probably one or two of us will come in with you. A sleeper carriage has been booked for you to Bangkok and I have written to Dr. Ouay asking him to meet you at the station. The Thai railway has a good reputation so you should be quite safe in a sleeper – though how much sleep you will get is another matter.

I have had a lot of work to do in the last few days, washing and dyeing robes, and trying to find out the shape of the boundary of this Wat. A supporter feels that we should have a fence around the Wat, so I have to make a theodolite and survey the boundary – a hell of a job. I doubt whether it will be finished for another week yet. It's not Dhamma of course (or rather my *sati* isn't good enough to make it Dhamma), but

Tan Acharn has asked me to do it – I think mainly to maintain good relations with the supporter, who is a bit touchy where foreigners are concerned. I sometimes wish that some of Tan Acharn’s supporters would learn more Dhamma and think less, or at least with more wisdom, about making merit. They don’t seem to see that merit of this sort, although good and an aid to faith and generosity, will only bring back material types of results in the future. Whereas the effort to improve the *citta* is a 1000 times more worthy.

Regarding the translation, I’m afraid the Wheel series won’t be printing it, mainly because Venerable Ñāṇaponika wanted various changes made. I shall get it printed in England, with Philip Badley in charge. As to *Wisdom Develops Samādhi*, it isn’t finished yet, and what you have is only the first three chapters. There are two more yet to come. I had to go through it again because there were so many mistakes in translation in the original one. Also, the three chapters you have are only a draft. To get the translation accurate I shall go through it two or three times more to put it into suitable English. As to Fullness of Heart or Greatness of Heart – I don’t know yet – I shall have to decide later on this. It’s often a matter of assessing the meaning accurately and then deciding

on the best English, which is often not easy to do. Would you let me have the three chapters back before you go, for I don't have another copy? I hope all is going well with practice. I expect Khun Mae Kaew (the senior nun) is keeping an eye on you and giving some help; she is very skilled and we all respect her.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Monday 22nd November

I spent the day in a sort of a daze. I seemed to lose faith in what I was doing. However, when at last I got into a good state of calm in the practice, I heard a car hooting. Tan Acharn was back! He and Tan Paññā came down to see us that very evening. He was concerned about the state of my health and practice. He said he was worried that I would not see the three signs of existence in the higher mental states where the *kilesas* are so subtle. In those states, I would know a happiness unimaginable – but I must not think that that was Nibbāna. Here in Thailand he can guide me, but in England I would be going alone into places I have never been before. He said I should be cautious about consulting the teachers there.

Tuesday 23rd November

I nearly set fire to my mosquito net. I took my little lamp inside in order to write up my notes – an insanely dangerous thing to do – but I had a feeling that Tan

Acharn would not consider it as dangerous as going on alone without a teacher. I expected that I would take the wrong road sometimes, but I was sure if I wrote and let him know of trends in my practice I would be all right. One evening we went up to the *sālā* to listen to a recital of the *Pāṭimokkha* – an astonishing feat where one monk rapidly recites all 227 rules of the monks’ disciplinary code on the full and new moon calendar days. Tan Acharn listened intently and corrected the monk if he made a mistake. Witnessing that event made me realise how incredibly lightweight our efforts were compared with those who were ordained. I was left with a respect for the monastics which I have never lost.

On my last day at Wat Pa Baan Taad the Sun, the Moon and the Earth were all aligned. Actually, people showed little excitement or interest, just a mild curiosity, but they did all borrow my dark glasses to have a look. My final meeting with Tan Acharn was very relaxed and happy, and he told me not to be afraid to come back again.

On my last morning, Tan Acharn’s mother came to my *kuṭi* and had an earnest conversation with me. Somehow we seemed to understand each other, although she spoke in Thai and I in English. She may have been talking about the eclipse –

she used to bring it up whenever we met on my future visits. She was full of *mettā*, and so kind to the little nun who accompanied her.

I had to be back in Bangkok by the 25th, and as it turned out I had to get an extra day on my visa from the immigration office.

Wat Pa Baan Taad,
5th December, 1965

Dear Jane,

I'm writing this so that Freda can take it with her tomorrow to give to you. Thanks for your medicine chest. Yes, nearly all the things will be useful.

You said in your letter (written before you left) how you will need to improve your mindfulness to cure your emotional instability. This is true, of course, but you also need to develop wisdom. Your *samādhi*, which is good and strong, will be your main asset in doing this. But actually, it is in your day-to-day life that I think you need to develop *sati-paññā* more than in your practice. Tan Acharn teaches that one must train oneself to do everything (even little things like sweeping the floor or washing dishes) in a meticulous and careful way, with little noise or bother and always using reason (seeing cause/effect in what one does). This really means that you are constantly thinking around and ahead of what you are doing. An example would be if you have to go from the kitchen to the bedroom to do something, and before going,

you deliberately stop a moment and think whether there is anything you need to carry upstairs, thereby saving yourself an extra trip. Another good way of training is, when you go shopping, to make out a shopping list and then try not to use it. In other words, take it with you but try to keep your mind so much on what you are doing that in time you will be able to recall everything without looking at the list. And, similarly, before going out, try to decide beforehand the order in which you do your shopping, to cause yourself the least trouble. These are small examples which can give you a good pattern for other activities. The important thing is to avoid impulsive, hasty actions, speech and thought – which are emotional and unstable – and to develop a deliberate calculating attitude which is cool and unemotional. For this, the best training is to stop and think for a moment, and before doing anything consider 1.) Is it *kusala* or *akusala*? 2.) Is it useful or not? 3.) Am I going about it the best way? 4.) Am I doing it in terms of the maximum result for minimum effort?

By doing this, one puts one's emotions under the influence of wisdom, and wisdom is cooling to the emotions and brings stability. Tan Acharn always stresses the importance of such training in one's ordinary life, and he also says that one must not be foolish. The difference between

foolishness and cleverness is just this: the foolish person (who may be a good or bad person) acts without thinking, whereas the clever person (who may be good or bad) plans and thinks first.

I asked Tan Acharn about your question (If *nāma-rūpa* is *anattā*, for whom is one developing the *citta*?). The answer is for oneself – for one’s true nature which is the pure and free *citta*, and which by some accident (*kamma*) has got involved with and attached to *nāma-rūpa*. Although truly speaking, *nāma*, and in a sense, *rūpa*, are modifications of the one *citta* and are not separate things. But really speaking, as Tan Acharn said, one must start with thinking in terms of *attā* (self) and later, when one develops wisdom, one thinks in terms of *anattā* (i.e., *nāma-rūpa* = 5 *khandhas* are all *anattā*). Finally, one discards both *attā* and *anattā* and doesn’t call ‘it’ anything. In other words, the teaching is not meant to be the ultimate truth, but is *Opanāyika Dhamma* – Dhamma which leads one on to see the truth for oneself.

I’m glad that your flight back was comfortable and that you had a good time with the Doctor and his family. They truly are very nice people, and it’s interesting to realise that he is the No. 2 psychiatrist in Thailand. An excellent thing is that you now have plenty of friends in Thailand who will willingly help you next time you come.

I can sympathise with you about crawling through the snow to your *kuṭi*. We have already had a few days of cold weather (down to 12 degrees Celsius inside the hut) and later on it is quite likely to drop down to 4 degrees Celsius at night. Our huts are hardly suited to the cold, though the daytime temperatures are usually warm.

All for now.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

A five-star letter. Such good practical advice, and at last an answer to the question that we must all have asked from time to time, and from someone who I believed had 'seen the truth for himself.' I have read this letter so often I almost know it by heart.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
26th January, 1966

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't written before, but I have been rather busy making things out of wood, and have been too tired to do anything but rest. We have been building a new *sālā* for the nuns. The white ants have gotten to the old one and it would have fallen down before long, which is a pity as its style was in keeping with the place. The new *sālā* is massively strong, with 29 great posts resting on concrete blocks – it makes one wonder if everything is *anicca*. It will have a corrugated iron roof, which is hardly in keeping with the rest of the building, though it will cut down on the amount of repair work needed.

I'm afraid I couldn't do much about the Crabwood Estate. The trouble is that unless one is actually looking for such a place, one cannot do much – and one would need to be on the spot to deal with it. Whereas at present, there is not even a coherent organization to handle it. Also, I feel that it is too big, and that 'green belt' would be too restrictive for monastic use. I think when the time comes we will need to start with

a small house in London as the 'base camp.' Then we can search for a place in the country where we can build a proper Wat.

With regard to your friend, what can one do? The only thing I can suggest is that he goes and has a word with Ven. Maṅgalo before he goes off to the wilds of Wales. Maṅgalo will surely give him straight and good advice on meditation, and he probably won't go far wrong on what Maṅgalo tells him. The only other thing is for him to boost up his *saddhā* by reading and constantly trying to think and penetrate the falsity of the world in which he is living; that is, by thinking, time after time, that everything in the world only has value up to the time of death. To see death as a shadow hovering over everyone and everything. But he should only do this sort of practice as long as it does not frighten him. By doing this, his wisdom may keep him from getting too caught up in the rounds of parties and exams.

I would definitely advise against going to a speaker class. In fact, why worry about public speaking? England needs teachers, not speakers. You will find a natural ability to talk developing in your own style in due time, so why learn someone else's style? A true talk from the heart in the vernacular is infinitely more valuable than plugging the same old stereotyped party line time after time.

I suppose you will have to give a talk to the Southampton University Religion Study group, though I suggest you put up a display of great reluctance to do so or they might start thinking of you as one of their regular speakers! I doubt whether there is much need to send out a copy of your talk, unless you would specially like me to check it. After all, how can a group take Dhamma very seriously when they are full to the brim with talks on Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism – the lot?

As to a Hampshire Buddhist Study Group, I suggest that you should be cautious about getting too involved in this sort of thing. If you do decide to go ahead with it, I suggest:

One meeting a month is quite enough to start with.

The members must have a definite program of study; that is, *Visuddhimagga*, Selections from the *Suttas*, Meanings of Pāli words (technical words), etc. I don't mean just reading, but studying, as though they were going to have an exam at the end of it.

Never start a magazine – they are a snare and ripe for delusion.

Keep all finances small and try to avoid any need for treasurers (official), books, etc.

Avoid having many official speakers down from London. Most of them don't understand much, however good they may be at speaking.

Keep your meetings as friendly and informal as possible. Each member could, for instance, give a brief outline of what they have studied in the previous month. But the members must keep their talk and discussion on Dhamma and not allow it to stray to other topics.

At the end of February I will probably go away to spend the hot season in a cave somewhere. Tan Acharn has already given me the OK. So once I'm there I don't suppose I shall be writing much until I return for the rains retreat.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

I am afraid I have quite forgotten who this friend was and why I was concerned about him; but Acharn Paññā's advice is very good. The letter mentions Ven. Maṅgalo. He was an Englishman, also known as John Richards, who spent some time at Wat Pa Baan Taad as a Buddhist monk. But his Christian upbringing was so strong in him that he could never fully commit himself to the Buddha-Dhamma. He eventually disrobed, married, and became an Anglican priest in Wales. While he was still a monk, he wrote an excellent little book on Mindfulness which has become something of a classic. It is still available from Wisdom Books. I took a Christian friend to a retreat he led at a local conference centre after he became a priest. I remember there was a mutiny because he had ordered the bar to be closed for the weekend as he didn't think alcohol and meditation should be mixed. As for myself, it took me quite some time to give up alcohol altogether. I never drank very much, so it wouldn't have been at all difficult for me, but I missed the social side.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

2nd April, 1966

Dear Jane,

In about two days I shall be off to Bangkok to pick up a car which will take me to my cave in the Lopburi district. This is a good time to go because the weather is getting hot and sticky here. Also, I shall just miss a big party of visitors who are coming for a week. Although I don't dislike them, 'high society' visitors like these tend to disturb the routine somewhat.

With regard to your letter of the 14th of February: I am uncertain whether, in fact, the *citta* is responsible for the breathing. There is obviously a link between the two, for the *citta* leaves the body entirely when one dies, and the breathing at the same time stops. But in cases such as anaesthesia and deep sleep, breathing continues on its own with apparently no aid from the *citta*. But also, we are told that in *nirodha samāpatti*, breathing stops. It seems that in normal conditions there is a purely physical side to breathing which is just a reflex function in the body, but this is also subject to modification by the state

of the *citta*. Also the *citta* is liable to be disturbed by the breath. I think it is important to bear in mind that breathing as an experience is totally bound up with feeling and that the only way one knows breathing is by feeling.

I hope you are out of the hospital and recovered now. Hospitals are sometimes good places to learn of the nature of *rūpa*. Tan Acharn is quite well. In the photos of him, I'm afraid the photographer caught him at just the wrong moment, as photographers often do. I was glad to hear that your talk went well.

Tan Acharn generally teaches that one can gain insight from *nimittas* (visions) by seeing cause/effect and/or the *ti-lakkhaṇa* in them. Broadly speaking *nimittas* may be classified as:

Internal *nimittas* (i.e., one's own body or parts of it).

External *nimittas* projected from one's *citta*.

Genuine external *nimittas* (*pretas*, *bhūtas*, *devas*, etc.).

Light *nimittas*.

Sound *nimittas* and those involving other senses.

Tan Acharn teaches that, at first, Type 1 may be promoted without

harm. With Type 4, light, if seen externally, should be brought back towards and into oneself (but one should never go out after it). Types 2 and 3 one should avoid until one is skilled with *nimittas*. Type 5 would probably be a bit like the light *nimittas*, i.e., take no special notice of external sounds, but concentrate on internal ones. The golden rule with *nimittas* is: keep your *citta* inside yourself and all will be well.

I hope all goes well.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad.

21st July, 1966

Dear Jane,

I am back in Wat Pa Baan Taad after 10 rather hectic days in Bangkok and I'm gradually getting things sorted out.

During my time at Wat Kow Chin Laa, I spent a lot of time in the caves for the first 6 weeks; after that, the rains came and the caves became rather too damp to stay in. But caves really are good in the hot season. They are cool and silent, except for the bats, and a lot of them are quite dark inside, so that one needs a flashlight or a candle. I found sometimes that a lot of *nimittas* arose, sometimes sound *nimittas*, but generally they were of little consequence. Large, dark caves have a rather odd and eerie quality about them. We are familiar with rooms that have four walls, but caves have no familiar pattern about them: the floor, walls and roof being at all angles and shapes with odd holes and caverns in them. It takes some time before one's *citta* will settle down and accept this unfamiliarity and insecurity. Caves give one a feeling of vastness, emptiness and silence – and also timelessness, for one knows

that unlike a building, the rocks of a cave were formed millions of years ago, and the whole of that area was under the sea at one time. All of which helps one to feel insignificant and inspires one to contemplate *anicca*.

On the 25th-26th July, Ven. Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhaṇa⁸, the Abbot of Wat Bovornives and my Upajjhāya, will arrive in London for the opening ceremony of the new Thai Vihāra in Richmond on 1st & 2nd of August, at which event the King of Thailand will be present. You may not be able to get near the place, because there is sure to be a vast mob. But if you do and you can talk with Tan Chao Khun (he speaks English), as he knows and respects Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, he would be glad to know that you had been out here to Wat Pa Baan Taad.

Thanks for the vitamin pills and other things which you sent out. They will help supplement my diet, which tends to get a bit thin at times in the rainy season.

8. Ven. Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhaṇa (1913-2013). He was named the 6th abbot of Wat Bovornives in 1961. In 1972, His Majesty the King of Thailand bestowed on him the title of Somdet Phra Nāṇasamvara. In 1989, he became the Supreme Patriarch or Sangharāja of the Thai Sangha.

I'll write again later, but I wanted to get this off today to let you know about the Thai Vihāra (though I expect there will be quite a lot about it in the press).

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

I don't remember going to the opening of the Thai Vihāra in Richmond. But Pat Wikinson was then secretary of The Buddhist Society and she got me an invitation to go to their reception for the King and Queen of Thailand. I was introduced to the Queen who, I remember, said she hoped that the Buddha-Dhamma would not be judged by the behaviour of some of the Thai monks in England. It must have been just about the time of the scandals involving Dhivaramsa.

Wat Pa Baan Taad,

31st July, 1966

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn has asked me to reply to your letters. With regard to your letter of May 23rd, the only comment he made was that you are quite right in saying that “mindfulness is the true home of the *citta*.” As Tan Acharn explained, *sati* should envelop the *citta*. So it is not incorrect to say that *sati* is its true home. He made no comment about the *citta* “sitting on top of your head” – and then becoming confused when it descended into your body. But Tan Acharn once explained to me that such ‘odd’ experiences are ‘*samādhī* experiences’ and are of countless varieties. He said that one must not take them too seriously, for they come and go. Where they come from and why, we don’t know, except to say vaguely that ‘it’s *kamma*.’

Tan Acharn wrote down these three things for your instruction after I had read your letters to him.

Sati (mindfulness) is the essential factor in ‘striving with diligence.’

You should investigate (examine) the physical body and its parts (*kāyagatāsati*), and their loathsomeness. This equals *vipassanā* by way of the body. (In this sentence Tan Acharn used the sign = which I translate as ‘equals’, but he may have meant ‘leads to’). You should do this practice at the proper time. I asked Tan Acharn what the proper time was – before, instead of, or after *ānāpānasati*? He replied that this depended on what works best. If touring round investigating the body leads to a fully concentrated state, it may be done before *ānāpānasati*. But if you find it better to do *ānāpānasati* first and when calm and concentrated, turn to investigate the body, then do it that way.

Nimittas are not things which it is necessary for us to become very interested in. (In other words, be mindful and don’t bother about the *nimittas*. In fact, the external ones can be a snare and a delusion.)

With regard to the comment in your second letter about whether you should allow your mind to get drawn into looking at them and you say – “perhaps I have no choice ” – Tan Acharn’s reply was to ask who is it that allows or does not allow your mind to look at them? And who is it that may have no choice?

I don’t think there would be any harm talking to Freda about these *nimittas*, but you must be very careful who else you talk to about them.

Such things upset people who don't understand, and the least that would happen is that they may call you mad or psychic.

In your letter of May 11th you say that you are getting a "lot of opposition from the rest of the family, who think that you are neglecting your duties." I suggest that you can quell a lot of this trouble by spending 5 or 10 minutes developing *mettā* with the 'other members of the family' in mind, each time you sit down to practise. This often works like a charm, and it also helps one's own practice.

If you and Freda want to (or can) come out here again this year, the Anon fellow is very willing to pay the expenses for your trip. I haven't talked to Tan Acharn about it yet, but I foresee no difficulties in that direction. I suspect your main difficulties are liable to be domestic opposition, though I am thinking of writing to Ian to reassure him somewhat. But the other members of your family I can do little about.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Tan Acharn's question: "Who is it that allows or does not allow your mind to look at them (the *nimittas*)? And who is it that may have no choice?" seems to me like a koan which I haven't yet found the answer to.

I think the family opposition was well justified at that stage. It must have been a distressing time for them to see me so involved in Buddhist affairs. After we moved to Cornwall, the opposition settled down as distances were too great for me to go to all their events. It didn't prevent me from going to Thailand, however. Also, we had taken on a small holding with 50 acres attached to it and we soon filled it up with animals. The farmhouse was big enough to accommodate lots of guests, and I really don't know how I managed to keep up any practice at all.

My father had been a practising Christian but became very agnostic in his middle age and a great admirer of Aldous Huxley. He thought it extraordinary that I should be expecting to find the truth in such an ancient religion. I wished I had been better at explaining things to him, but it was difficult as my parents had become television addicts. Whereas in the old days we would have spent the evenings talking, now it was all 'Dixon of Dock Green' and 'The Brains Trust' and suchlike.

Wat Pa Baan Taad,

16th October, 1966

Dear Jane,

I am sorry it's so long since I wrote you – I haven't yet replied to the letter which you wrote in August.

I think it may be good if I write to Ian, because I rather feel that he is a bit in the dark about meditation, and its purpose and its effects. And perhaps he feels a bit put-out, feeling that it's outside his sphere of influence, so to speak (though I am sure he would never admit this and maybe does not recognise it in himself). Do you think Ian could be persuaded to read a copy of *Training in Meditation*? – the booklet which I translated. I'm afraid a lot of it would be too technical for him, but there is enough there which he could understand to point out the direction of meditation fairly well. These booklets should have reached you by now; if not, please let me know.

With regard to your practice: your letter of the 5th of October arrived about 3 days ago and has been commented on by Tan Acharn as follows:

Don't be afraid of all the odd sensations such as heaviness, weightlessness, changes of heart beat, 'bumps' in the heart, feelings of faintness, breath ceasing, etc. They are all *anicca*. The only danger in all these things is being afraid of them, which pins one's attention to them and thus enhances their effect. A vicious cycle!

Keep to the heart position (as your anchor) and all will be well.

The 'one who knows' must remain in the heart and not follow after various sensations. It's rather like the operator in a telephone exchange who is fully in touch with occurrences at the other end of the various telephone lines, but remains well established in the exchange. If the exchange operator were to go to each caller there would rapidly be chaos. Similarly if the *citta* (the one who knows) goes out to every sensation, one soon gets into trouble. (This is my simile, not Tan Acharn's).

With regard to your earlier letter, Tan Acharn said, yes, your assessment of *jhāna* states (and specifically the fifth *jhāna*, 'the Sphere of Boundless Space') were premature. Tan Acharn said that he only talks about *samādhi* until the pupil's practice has developed to the stage where he can give individual instructions on *jhāna*. It is easy to experience things in meditation practice, then to read descriptions in the books and to put the two together incorrectly. My own little experience has shown me that most of the explanations in the books (*Ti-piṭaka*, etc.) are not

very precisely defined, while the experience of states such as *jhāna* are changes that occur in the mind which are as clear-cut as walking from one room to another. But you must not infer from this that I have any experience of *jhāna*!

You mustn't think that Tan Acharn is disappointed with your progress. He knows that as a lay person you have many problems and difficulties to overcome and he accepts that you are genuinely trying. I don't think Tan Acharn really sets up any preconceived ideas about how much progress one should make!

Concerning *Wisdom Develops Samādhi*: I have now gone through corrections to the translation twice and hope to have the English in shape for printing by the end of the year.

Yours,

Paññā

P.S. Ven. Cherry managed to organise a lot of colour photos which I will send by sea mail. I'm afraid they are not very skilfully taken, but they will interest you.

Wat Pa Baan Taad,

23rd November, 1966

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. And Tan Acharn thanks you for sending one to him. With regard to your coming out here in January, Tan Acharn said that he felt it was hardly worth coming for such a short period. But he also said that he had no actual objection to your coming. I suggest that if you are, in any case, travelling via Bangkok (to Australia or elsewhere), then come by all means, as the extra cost would be quite small. But if it means a special journey from England, it would be better to postpone it until you can spend a longer time here.

We held our Kaṭhina ceremony about four days ago. It was very much quieter than last year with few visitors, for which, I think, we were all quite glad. These large ceremonies are, I suppose, good for faith, but not good for practice.

Your practice sounds as though it is going in the right direction. Tan Acharn has made no comment on it for some time, which means that it

is alright. He has said in the past that as long as his followers are keeping 'within Dhamma,' he lets them get on with it in their own way. It is, however, quite good practice to forget all about *jhāna*, and 'paths', and *samādhi* (and all those terms which come from the books) and to stick only to those technical terms about which one has no doubt as to their meaning. For the rest, I suggest that you make up your own terms for your own convenience, to describe your experiences. For instance, 'the floating state' or the 'underwater state,' etc. These won't mean much to anyone else, but at least you can't be wrong in using such terms.

Thanks for your offer to pay for printing *Wisdom Develops Samādhi* in England. Anon has also told me that he would like to pay for it to be done in England, so perhaps the costs could be divided up when the time comes (it should be ready about the end of the year, or at latest January).

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Bovornives in Bangkok

22nd April, 1967

Dear Jane,

I am writing from Wat Bovornives in Bangkok. I have come to the city to see the doctors about appendix trouble. It is not yet really troublesome, but gives signs of being chronic, so I have come in good time to have it examined and dealt with.

Tan Acharn wants me to thank you for sending him that letter in Thai (I imagine the Thai person in your group wrote it for you). He also said that he was glad that you were going to do another session of practice at Biddulph and that you were persisting in managing to sustain your interest in practice. And he also said thank you for the photo of the doctor and his wife. I get the impression that Tan Acharn is quite genuinely pleased that you are keeping on at your practice despite all the distractions and diversions of the household life in England at present.

With regard to the light-hearted, detached frame of mind which you write about in your letter of 18th March: of course, this is *kusala*, as long as it is not associated with flippancy. Therefore, it should be well grounded in calm and not be buoyant and unstable, which could lead on to merriment and that would be the overturning of this state, and wrong. In such a case it would hardly be associated with detachment.

Concerning *ānāpānasati*: Tan Acharn never teaches about the four tetrads of *ānāpānasati*. Briefly, Tan Acharn says that *ānāpānasati* is a method of anchoring the *citta* and leading it to the heart (perhaps also in association with *buddho* repetition). Having got to the heart, the *citta* withdraws from sensation, and becomes *ekaggatā*, a very cool and calm state in which breathing probably appears to stop. Having reached that point, you must simply gain skill in getting there easily and in remaining in the heart. After that, you should turn seriously to investigating the body, using the *samādhi* that you have attained to precipitate the necessary states of contemplation that are required. You can think of *samādhi* as being the tool that you forge to do the work; and contemplating the body (and later on the other four *khandhas*) as being the work that needs doing. You must be very careful not to place

so much emphasis on forging the tool that you neglect to do the work. And you must also remember that you must learn how to use the tool of *samādhi* when it is forged, or at least partly forged, for the tool does not need to be perfected before you can use it!

I got your two letters from Biddulph which don't need much comment. But it is worth keeping in mind that as long as you have ideas and thoughts about the *kilesas* and fetters, wondering whether they are still there or not, you can reckon for sure that they are still there. I think it is only when one knows absolutely without the faintest doubt that they have gone, and when one can see and know very clearly exactly what their nature is and just how and why they have been got rid of, that one can say, "Now they have gone." Until that happy day, they are still lurking about – and you must not underestimate their strength and their subtlety.

I have written to Brian Dyas and I hope that my letter will help him a bit. With regard to Freda, she is sometimes right and sometimes wrong, and it is important to assess what she says against cause/effect. But it is important not to think that Freda, or anyone else, is always (or usually) right or wrong, but to assess each occasion on its merits. Attachment

to Tan Acharn as the teacher is good provided you realise that the external Tan Acharn must be dispensed with as a teacher once you have developed the internal Tan Acharn in your own heart. Until then you must have full faith in the external Tan Acharn.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Bovornives in Bangkok

27th April, 1967

Dear Jane,

Received your two letters of 13th and 17th April and am hastening to reply before I go into the hospital tomorrow to get this appendix removed.

One or two important points emerge from your letters. Firstly, in having faith in Tan Acharn you must be very careful to what extent you have become involved with other teachers. Having been accepted as Tan Acharn's follower, you have in effect been accepted into the 'school' of Tan Acharn Mun's followers, and it is best to try and keep one's association with teachers to this 'school.' In going to Biddulph you naturally came under the influence of a teacher of a quite different school (though I don't want to comment on its virtues or otherwise). This is further suggested by your previous letters, which talked of having got rid of the *kilesas*. In fact, it is a theme of that school of meditation that they believe the *kilesas* can more or less be got rid of after a short intensive period of their training methods. (Actually, they

probably can be got rid of quite rapidly under intensive practice, but only after years of initial preparation – and those are rare individuals indeed nowadays. If this were not so, why are there not more Arahants and valuable teachers walking about? Unless you are one of the few gifted people whose *kamma* is just right, it is likely that the *kilesas* are still present.)

What all this amounts to is that you must be more careful in guarding your *citta* against dangers, for your *citta* is too sensitive and not yet stable enough for you to take unnecessary risks.

I would suggest that you avoid all contacts with teachers other than Tan Acharn, such as those who are variously spread around the U.K. – except, of course, for mere social and courtesy contacts, and even then you must be circumspect. Always remember that any loss to your *citta* is very important; but being thought by others to be standoffish, foolish, gauche, tongue-tied, etc. is quite unimportant if this is necessary for the guarding of your *citta*. Being thought a fool can actually be most valuable in that it pricks one's conceit, and people leave one alone.

I suggest, for the time being, that you don't go on any more of these intensive weeks of meditation practice because you need to have a good teacher on hand. And even if Tan Acharn can and does use psychic

means of teaching, he is inherently limited in what he can do by the imperfection of the receiving mechanism! I feel that you would be better advised, at present, to cultivate the mundane virtues in ordinary life such as patience, humility, restraint and so on, and limit your practice to your usual two or so hours a day. You must understand that there has been something very wrong with your practice. For instance, in your letter of the 17th you head it by saying: “Do you think that six hours practice is too much for lay life?” Then underneath you write: “Dear Tan Paññā, I think I am beginning to come back to normal.” Something is wrong here!! Practice should make you feel more normal, cool, collected, capable and clearheaded, and not ‘abnormal.’ For that reason, you should class all the *nimittas* you’ve had as delusion or hallucination.

Although delusion (*moha*) is at the root of your troubles, I think you should take a very good look at sensuality, that is, craving for sensuality and sensual expression, largely in terms of feeling and an impatience with a state of calm in which nothing in particular is happening.

You really must try to keep rooted in normality and ordinariness and avoid fantasy and thinking of your own subjective experiences as being universal. Questions such as, “Does it matter if the breath goes clockwise or counter-clockwise?” is obviously based on an experience of yours, but

it is purely subjective. And you can answer that question yourself by considering that your breathing has gone on for over 40 years without such considerations and you seem to have survived just fine. This is the sort of thing I mean by being normal; for if you start thinking that all these fantasy *nimittas* and odd experiences are supra-normal, you can easily fall into the fault of spiritual-pride. Again, there is something all wrong with your understanding when you take “a sort of gliding state, very like skiing” to be *Nibbāna*. Even though upon later reflection you rejected that understanding, it means that your basic understanding of the nature of *Nibbāna* is far too gross. Always remember that if you can see it, hear it, smell it, taste it, feel it or think it, it is not *Nibbāna*.

You raised a question about the “free *citta*.” I think you have misconceived Tan Acharn’s meaning when he uses the term “free *citta*”. “Free *citta*” just means the normal *citta* which is free from delusion and attachment. And no, of course the teacher does not cause one to be aware of the *kilesas* in oneself, except by the normal process of teaching; but nobody can make one see one’s *kilesas* if one won’t look at them oneself. As is said, “Buddhas only point the way.”

Feeling not completely in control of your body is another of these abnormal manifestations. It is more or less a form of compulsive

neurosis. The “force” which you say “makes me resolve to bow or *pūjā*” is feeling, bodily feeling. If those actions, which you do compulsively, are irrational, inappropriate, wrong or faulty, you must be mindful of the feeling, its arising and its dying away and ceasing, but do not react. You should only permit those actions to take place if they are quite appropriate and correct in any given situation.

I’m sorry if some of the above advice seems rather strong, but you must try to see that your present way is quite wrong and is liable to bring discredit to Buddhism in those people whom you know. I won’t go so far as to say that your present way and difficulties are entirely the wrong way, for I am not competent to say that; and under the close supervision of a teacher such as Tan Acharn, plus a proper discipline and a suitable environment, your present ways would not matter. But in your present circumstances, you have to accept that you must develop gradually and steadily, and that forcing the pace will only lead to trouble.

You write about using I Ching. Use the I Ching if you like, but never rely on it for decisions that matter unless there is absolutely no other way. I have also looked at and experimented with the I Ching, but I found its answers so obscure and ambiguous as to be fairly valueless.

Please give my regards to Ian – and for yourself, please try to cool off, calm down, relax and build up your practice on a foundation of mundane ordinariness.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

13th May, 1967

Dear Jane,

It is very kind of you to ask Tanya to send money to Robert for the treatment of my appendix, but it has not been necessary because the doctors at Siriraj hospital, headed by Dr. Ouay, have very kindly fixed everything without cost. I suppose it's my good *kamma* that I get such treatment, but from where and when it comes I don't know.

The appendix was removed about two weeks ago. Apparently it was typically 'chronic,' so it had to come out sooner or later. I was in the hospital for about one week and I have been here in Wat Bovornives for another week. I shall return to the North-East tomorrow. I still won't be able to do much heavy physical work for about three weeks, but I feel well recovered and more or less normal.

I am very doubtful of the advice you received to develop the first *jhāna* and to raise a *nimitta*. In fact, it is hard to know the meaning of *jhāna*, because the descriptions given in the Commentaries, and even the

Suttas, are quite inadequate, making it is very easy to deceive oneself. Tan Acharn never talks directly about *jhāna*, but instead prefers to use the word *samādhi*. With *jhānas*, it is too easy to start thinking about them and imagining that one has reached this or that *jhāna*, which becomes a great field for the arousing of conceit and delusion.

In fact, the best way is to know your own experiences directly, and forget all about the levels of *jhāna* and the grades of *samādhi* for the time being. Nowadays, there are far too many people who talk ‘knowingly’ and far too few who are ready to admit that they know nothing about those states. The main reason for the former is books, in which people read different opinions about *jhānic* states, usually selecting those passages which they like and rejecting those which go against the grain. For this reason, you must always be very careful and hesitant in assuming that you understand any of the technical terms that are written down in the Suttas.

As to the *nimitta*, I feel it’s wrong to try to develop a *nimitta*. If it comes on its own, so well and good; but you should keep in mind the relevant section of *Wisdom Develops Samādhi* where Tan Acharn discusses *nimittas*. You should never be ‘carried away’ by *nimittas*, however pleasant, beautiful or calming they appear. They are after all only sensory images

– like pictures and sounds at the cinema – however real they may appear to be, they are all *anicca, dukkha, anattā*. They are like a mirage or a dream, and if you see something more in them you only increase your delusion. Also, don't assume too much about which of your *kilesas* is the strongest. The one that appears strongest can merely be the one that you can see the most clearly, which may not be the strongest at all. And do be careful of building up views, such as, “other people being Māra's agents.” This is truly dangerous. You must see that Māra is the one who puts such thoughts into your mind and that your own *kilesas* are the agents of Māra, not other people.

Thanks very much for sending those two steel rulers, they are just right and will do me fine. I meant to mention this in my earlier letters, but I forgot about it.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad
16th June, 1967

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't replied before now, the weather has been very damp and sticky, making it a bit difficult to settle down to anything. Thank you for sending the parcel for Vesak⁹ – and Tan Acharn also says “thank you.” The money which you sent to Robert has arrived and I propose to ask him to keep it for the general use of all the Western monks here, as when they need to travel to Bangkok to renew their visas.

The appendix seems to be completely healed now and all is back to normal. It healed up very quickly and gave very little trouble, but it serves as a good reminder that the body is steadily growing older and its parts are liable to need more and more repairs as time goes on.

With regard to your comment on the book *Give Your Child a Superior*

9. Vesak (Pāli: Visākha) day: The festival of the full moon day in May that commemorates the birth of Prince Siddhattha, the day Siddhattha became the Buddha and the death (Parinibbāna) of the Buddha.

Mind (there is something a bit odd about this title!), I can't help feeling that there is too much of a tendency in the West to separate the child from the environment; both are part of each other and the child learns freely and easily and quickly (and often quite happily) from the world. A child's chief difficulties are nearly always in relationship to other people, not things. The child has an inborn respect for the laws of cause/effect and it quickly learns that things in their environment respond to the law very accurately. But people? Here the child can often be at a loss; for people – including those nearest to it, whom it trusts most – often (due to *kilesas*) act and do things in ways that seem quite contradictory. Such people are the child's teachers and its most important sources of learning, so it's no wonder that so many children grow up to be rather neurotic – or worse. Although one can generalize fairly easily in regard to children and the way they learn, it is far more difficult to do so for adults practising Dhamma, because people's paths differ so much that it makes the whole situation very much more complex. I think the most one can say is that the environment and learning patterns stem from *kamma*.

You ask in your letter, “Are these impersonal forces the teacher that one must seek?” But to start with, it may be well for you to examine

what you mean by “impersonal forces.” Actually, as I understand it, one does not have to seek for the “inner teacher” – he is there all the time, teaching all the time – all we must do is listen. This means that you must reduce the distraction of self-centred thoughts which create such a din that we can’t hear the teacher. This is particularly true of views and opinions which are like sirens blowing in our ears/minds. One important aspect of the “teacher” is what we call conscience. Think about this, for it demonstrates how the teacher never forces us, but just points the truth out to us quite clearly. It’s then up to us to do or not to do. This is basically the way Tan Acharn teaches, which was also the way the Buddha taught.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

20th July, 1967

Dear Jane,

Received letters from you and Ian, and I've checked with Tan Acharn (translating both letters to him). Tan Acharn was not very concerned about Ian's letter, for as he said, with the best intentions in the world Ian can have little understanding of what is going on in your practice. But as regards your letter, he said that your practice seems to be going very well. There are only two dangers that you must guard against. The first is fear. Ian said he reckoned you had a fear of going insane, and in your letter you talked about those "terrifying bouts of concentration." It is important to realise that the danger of insanity lies only in the fear itself and that without fear those experiences are harmless. The second danger is letting your *citta* wander away from yourself (away from inside the body). This second one is a more subtle danger, because you may be tempted to send your attention out after some alluring and apparently harmless object (this is my comment).

Tan Acharn said that, with regard to your feeling of being “heavy-eyed” and “headachy,” this is probably due to the fact that when you concentrate on seeing parts of the body you become too sharply focused, like an augur boring into the meditation object.¹⁰ But if you spread your concentration and are more gentle with the object (as though you were blowing your breath onto it), you would probably avoid those feelings. He also said when you are feeling a bit agitated, go back to *ānāpānasati* to “cool off” and rest. Tan Acharn said that if there were any real cause for alarm (or if it were otherwise worth it) that you should come out to Thailand. Or if that proves impractical, he might fly to England. But in the present instance neither is necessary.

Although Tan Acharn was not very concerned about Ian’s letter, at the same time it is necessary to take notice of it. Ian doesn’t understand the meditation practice and is not in a position to see what is dangerous and undesirable and what is not; at the same time, he is probably your most important daily contact with the external world. As such, he is in a position to make things easier or more difficult for your practice (with, of course, the best of motives for your welfare however mistaken

10. This seems to be a psychological reflex – when one concentrates one’s mental vision it had a corresponding effect on one’s eyes, as though one were seeing with one’s eyes.

he may be). This is why I wrote in my last letter that I was doubtful of the wisdom of doing a week's practice at home – though if Ian is ready to put up with it, then you may even be better off at home.

All for now.

Yours,

Paññā

P.S. I shall write to Ian tomorrow.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

29th August, 1967

Dear Jane,

We were all sorry to hear of your accident, though it looks as though you were really quite fortunate. But I wish more people would fit and use seat belts. If you had used one you would probably have escaped without injury. You talk about a slight headache – I suggest that if it persists, you don't just ignore it, but check with the doctors to find out why. A persistent headache often indicates that something is wrong which should be dealt with now, before it leads to any more trouble. Don't worry about whether you can do practice or not. A very serious brain injury would be required to really affect your practice, which would bring on so many other symptoms and troubles that you would probably not be concerned about meditation practice anyway. If, however, you do find that your practice is affected, that will almost certainly be a psychological effect, rather than a physiological one. You may possibly find odd fears arising which stem from this accident (but

those would be triggered by past *kamma*). Most probably you will notice little difference once you have, so to speak, sorted yourself out.

You can certainly learn a lot from this incident. Think how only one minute before the accident you almost certainly had no thoughts of accidents or death – then in a matter of seconds the car skidded off the road! In other words, you must try to be prepared for death at every moment, for life in a physical body is dangerous and the world is full of uncertainty and hazards. This means that you should learn to keep such a watch on your *citta* that you ward off all unskilled thoughts, speech and actions at all times. That is to say, you must be mindful and always keep your mind to the present. Then, you will be prepared for death at every moment of your life.

With regard to your young friend and the trouble she is going through: I don't know her, of course, but it seems probable that marriage, which in the West is idealized to such a degree, has proven to be just as full of *dukkha* as everything else (or perhaps more so). This would naturally come as a great disappointment, and probably necessitates a complete readjustment of her ideas and views on life. This insecure position is bound to be full of *dukkha*, because the more strongly the old views are clung to, the greater the *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is the best

teacher – provided that one does not oppose it too much with conceit. Herein lies the danger; for conceit clings to the view of self, which is a complex structure built up from a person’s long and shadowy past, and *dukkha* comes along to display the falsity of that self-view. In other words, changing events show up this ‘self-structure’ as being *anicca*, but conceit clings to that same structure as being fixed and unchanging. Because of that, the constant change of *anicca*, which is bound to win that tug of war, is constantly kept out of sight by conceit – and that is delusion. But because the truth is inherently known in the *citta*, there is constant anxiety (*dukkha*). Then, when events change, so that that deluded ego-structure is so far from the truth that the *citta* can no longer keep it out of sight, a traumatic situation develops, the result of which is either an acceptance of the truth (wholly or in part) or madness, dependent on one’s *kamma*. This is the same technique used in brainwashing; except that, instead of ‘the truth’ the brainwashers implant their views.

The applying of ‘poultice after poultice’ which you talk of in your letter is, of course, quite true, but this means also a partial giving way to the truth. Unfortunately, in this world there is also the tendency to establish a new conceit based on one’s new position, which is just as

troublesome as the one you abandoned! Such is the way of people that drift in *samsāra*, which happens mainly because they cannot bear the feeling of emptiness in the pits of their stomachs – which is just feeling and nothing else!

You say that the Group has been a source of irritation recently. Frankly, I am not surprised, for the way of groups (and families) is to start by respecting and paying deference to the ‘elders,’ until each member finds his niche, settles in and begins to opine from his corner. At that point, chaos will ensue unless the leader is very strong and/or has supreme authority, as the Buddha with the Saṅgha or Tan Acharn in this Wat. Those who are easy to work with in such a situation are usually very quiet, unassuming and not opinionated. They get on easily with everyone because they are not conceited, and they are generally very willing to be helpful. They are the type of person whom you don’t notice at first but whom you usually learn to appreciate later.

You ask about *nimittas* of headless bodies and skeletons, whether they weaken the *kilesas* or not? They can, but not necessarily. It depends on the right conditions. But a *nimitta* like that, which sticks so tightly that you can’t forget it or get it out of your mind, is very effective – it has staying power like a pop tune that sticks in the mind. It is effective

because every time outgoing exuberance arises, there is that skeleton to remind you of Dhamma to the dismay of your playful and unruly *citta*.

Tan Acharn says thanks for sending the two letters. He says that he was glad to hear that you escaped with little injury from the accident and he was also pleased to hear that you were doing another week's meditation practice. Tan Acharn is quite glad for you to come out here again. He said the best time is during the rains retreat which ends on the 18th of October (we have a new road so it is easy to get here in any weather). During the rains he will be here nearly all the time for sure; whereas after the rains, he can't guarantee how much of the time he will be available. But if you can't make it before Oct. 18th, the later dates you suggest will be alright. But keep in mind our Kaṭhina ceremony will be held sometime between Oct. 18th and Nov. 18th – accompanied by lots of guests and lots of palaver.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

We were lucky that neither Patty Elwood (who was driving) nor I were badly injured in the car accident. We were driving along a country road from Winchester to Farley Mount, not far from where we lived in Crabwood. There was a cross road ahead down a steep little incline with a car speeding towards it. Patty had to put on the brakes and the car turned over. At least we avoided a crash.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

23rd September, 1967

Dear Jane,

I got your letter yesterday. Your travel arrangements are all settled. Khun Ying Sermsri has arranged for someone to meet you at Udon Thani station to bring you here on 4th October, though I can't help feeling that a sleeper on the night train would be preferable to the so-called fast train. The (night) 'express' is rather slow, the 'fast train' (by day) is definitely slow, and the slow train hardly moves. Such are Thai railways at present, but they are a lot safer than the roads. About two weeks ago, the chief doctor of Udon hospital died from a motor accident. Like your accident, the car swerved and rolled over, though I don't know the details. I was rather sorry, because he was a good man and a supporter of Tan Acharn. It was he who built the Udon General Hospital. As accidents usually occur in threes, only a few days later I heard that Dr. Charoen was involved in an accident while driving Dr. Citti's car in Bangkok. Again, I don't know the details but believe that nobody was hurt.

Thanks for the offer to bring out things from England. I would like one (plastic) bag (envelope) of 'Polycell' powder. This is a glue that they usually use for sticking on wall paper. When you get to Bangkok, I imagine that you will see Robert Exell and I would be grateful if you would bring up my copy of the *Diamond and Heart Sutra* by Conze, which Robert has in his house.

All for now.

Paññā

*At Wat Pa Baan Taad
October 1967*

Dear Jane,

I am sending my stove over with Nid and I am giving him instructions on how to light it so that he can give you a demonstration. It is much easier to use than the pressure stove, which I can use instead because I know its tricks. If you will give your paraffin lantern to Nid, I will trim the wick and get it working properly.

The worst has happened: someone has presented Tan Acharn with an electric generator and fluorescent lights (two of them pink) for the *sālā*, so I have my work cut out trying to sort that all out. Tan Acharn has refused generators in the past, but this person didn't ask first, she just brought it and plonked it down – so what to do?

No time to spare, will write again later.

Paññā

*Jane's Second Visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad.
October to November 1967*

Jane's Recollections

This time I received real encouragement from my husband Ian for my second visit to Thailand, again funded through the generosity of Mr. Anon. Ian had complete faith in Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho, having met him when he came to stay with us in Winchester to give a talk at Southampton University. He had not met Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, but he obviously hoped Tan Acharn might be able to sort out the difficulties I experienced in my practice.

Luckily he had no idea of what a dangerous part of Thailand I was going into. The Communists had taken over Laos and there were stories of how badly they were treating the Buddhist monks there. Wat Pa Baan Taad wasn't all that far from the border and Thailand was widely expected to be the next country to fall.

The Americans were bombing Vietnam (and probably Laos) from their air base in Udon Thani, from where we heard loud explosions from time to time. There was a Communist insurgency in the North-East region of Thailand, which was a

very poor area remote from the government in Bangkok. Aware of the dangers, I kept a pair of 'running shoes' and a knapsack of the basics at the ready should an evacuation become necessary.

Luckily the local Communists never invaded the Wat, though one evening the nuns and laywomen were ordered to sleep on the floor of the kitchen *sālā*, while a small battle seemed to be raging in the not too far distance.

At night, worries caused by the sounds of continual activity on the roads or the skies above would often give rise to a gut-wrenching fear. I attempted to quell it by using *paññā* or wisdom, repeating, "What is the point of worrying about dying when my body is composed of physical elements that are bound to break up someday anyway? Especially since, according to Tan Acharn, the *citta* does not die." Then I would investigate the actual feeling of the fear, seeing it as just *dukkha*, manifesting as a hard knot in the pit of the stomach. I won't say I've defeated the fear because fear does still arise in my heart. However, it is much easier now to treat the fear with equanimity and bearing with it until it subsides. Better still, I smile at it, since the *kilesas* don't like being laughed at. It is all good practice. A bit of invaluable advice Tan Acharn gave was always to get up and investigate what it is that is frightening one.

However, when gangs of ‘brigands’ sometimes came around to inspect the things on my veranda and search under the *kuṭi* and in the ashes of the fire outside, it seemed better to keep out of sight. There was no wall in those days so people and animals from the village could come and go as they pleased. Khun Mae, Tan Acharn’s mother, was a dab hand with a sling shot, which she would use when dog fights erupted or there was an animal about she didn’t like the look of.

It could have been very lonely in those days being the only European female, but the animals were a great comfort. The birdsong was so amazing that they really seemed to be telling me stories. And there were those great big butterflies, the size of saucers, swooping around the trees. In the early morning the cream-coloured squirrels with their guttural calls would come thundering over the roof of the *kuṭi* as a reminder that it was time to get on with the business of living. Of course, there were also scorpions and rats to deal with, and frogs in the bathroom (and probably cockroaches too). The huge spiders that came and sat by the lamp at night would pounce on the poor moths that came to the light. Tan Acharn kept warning us to be careful where we put our feet to avoid stepping on snakes. I found it sensible to keep the mosquito net tucked in well at night so that a snake

didn't join me for a bit of warmth. The mosquitoes there seemed especially partial to a bit of European blood. We were advised to close the window shutters before dusk to avoid mosquitoes floating into the room when they rose up at dusk. Of course it was vital to put on anti-mosquito spray before sitting or doing walking practice outside. Having lived in Africa for four years, none of this was too much of a problem for me. I just got on with it.

In those early days, I had no idea what the routine was at Wat Pa Baan Taad, and no one thought to give me any guidance. I would blunder about doing the sweeping or my washing at the pump when no one else was around. I could never practice late at night so I would turn in about nine o'clock, but I began again doing walking meditation at two or three a.m. The nuns usually started preparing food in the early hours so as to be ready to take the food offerings up to the *sālā* at seven thirty. It was a comfort to hear the rhythmic chop-chop-chopping as they cut up the vegetables and the thud-thud-thudding as spices were pounded.

I didn't attempt to cook anything in those days. When I did go up to offer food to the monks returning from *piṇḍapāta*, Khun Ying Sermsri kindly let me share in the giving from her trays of food. Later, a kind village woman would give me little baskets of rice to '*sai bat*' (placing food in monks' bowls).

Tan Acharn and Acharn Paññā would come down very occasionally and sit on my veranda in the evenings to hear about my day's practice. It's hard to believe it now! Hearing their soft voices talking to each other as they approached, my heart would lift with joy. Often one of the nuns joined us briefly to offer Tan Acharn a small tray of betel nut and sometimes a saucer of *jaggery* for Acharn Paññā.

I was grateful for these visits, realising how incredibly lucky I was to have this chance to learn how to break free from the bad habits that had been the cause of so much *dukkha*, not only to myself but my friends and family. Here are some of the things Tan Acharn said that I wrote down after they left, hopefully correctly. Acharn Paññā did all the translating of course.

“When one finally discovers the *citta*, one finds that it is something so strange, wonderful and exciting that one is no longer interested in things outside. With continued practice a stage comes when the *citta* starts to become clear and bright. These practices are for gathering the *citta* into the centre, like pulling in the lines of a fishing net. When spread out, the net is difficult to grasp; but when it is gathered into a compact ball it can be easily grasped. Or, one can say that the *citta* is like the trunk of a tree while the four [mental] *khandhas* are like its branches. It is our job to find the trunk, not become lost in the branches.”

Tan Acharn illustrated the flowering of the *citta* by putting the fingers of one hand over those of the other and then taking the upper away and allowing fingers of the lower hand to open like a lotus.

“When the *citta* is free, it will go its own way and the five *khandhas* will go theirs. From that point on, the *khandhas* will no longer have power over the *citta*. Of course, the *citta* will be free of *kilesas* by then.”

It was many, many years before I was to experience any of this, but it was beautiful inspiring Dhamma. Tan Acharn rarely talked about paths or attainments, only about the rooting out of *kilesas*. After Tan Acharn finished speaking and they left, my concentration came more easily and lasted for longer than usual.

Nid was a Wat boy. He was very serious and well-behaved, which was more than could be said of some of the other village boys, who would climb up ladders and peer into my window to see what the European lady was up to. I am happy to say that Nid eventually ordained as a monk and is now the Abbot of his own Monastery!

In those days, electric power from the generator never reached beyond the main *sālā*. Now, in 2010, laypeople are able to recharge their mobile phones in the outlets in the *sālā* and propane gas provides fuel for cooking and running the refrigerators.

In the old days, all the kuşis had little earthenware pots in which one could cook or boil water for afternoon tea. Laymen would bring ice for the coolers sometimes. Even in the winter months it could get quite hot in midday. However, when the sun went down it became cold quickly and it was wise to have one's bath soon after sweeping the paths when one was still hot and welcomed the cold water; otherwise, it could be a bit of an ordeal!

Wat Pa Baan Taad

October 1967

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn left on business again today – he is rather occupied with various projects nowadays. While he’s here he acts like a protective umbrella, which helps to keep one’s *citta* cool. When he goes away to Bangkok or elsewhere, the ‘atmosphere’ in the monastery changes completely.

Tan Acharn has not yet said much about your practice, so until and unless he says differently, I suggest you work on these lines:

With *ānāpānasati*, you should aim at a clear awareness of breathing, not only when you sit and practise, but at all times. Learn to investigate to see under what circumstances you are breathing in long, or short, or long in and short out, or long out and short in. Try to determine in all this what are the associated actions, feelings, memories, thoughts, sensations through all the five (or six) senses. In other words, try to see and find out all about breathing and its relationship to life in all its aspects.

The above is quite a tall order, and you probably won't be able to do it for more than an hour or two at a time. So I suggest that you also spend some time trying to reduce sensual attachment (*rāga-taṇhā*) by contemplating the 32 parts of the human body. But, in addition to the *asubha* aspect of this contemplation, try also to visualize a corpse, viewing it as bloated, discoloured and so on. First visualize it as a woman's body; then, when you've had some success, as a man's. This practice will help to cut out the root of *rāga-taṇhā*. If this contemplation brings up loathing and disgust, that's excellent. But if fear arises, you must stop. And if hatred arises, you must turn to the hatred and deal with it. I am suggesting these methods because last night I felt you were at a bit of a loss as to how you should go on.

If you would like to, there's no reason why you should not go out every day to give food to the monks in the morning. Nid can easily arrange rice for you to offer.

Paññā

P.S. I am enclosing an outline of the rules about food, it may be worth keeping this and showing it to Freda – because few people in England will know about this.

*An outline of the way the
Vinaya rules apply to Food:*

Food is only allowable between dawn and midday (by the sun).

Food may not be kept or stored overnight once it has been offered to a bhikkhu; that is, food received in the morning must be eaten before midday, and any leftovers must be disposed of. As the food offered to a bhikkhu is in effect offered to the Saṅgha, leftovers cannot be given to another bhikkhu on subsequent days. This also means that food received by a bhikkhu after midday cannot be eaten the following day, for it cannot be kept overnight.

Virtually everything that is offered to us on *piṇḍapāta* or during our mealtime is classified as ‘food.’ For example, when salt is given on *piṇḍapāta*, that salt is food, but salt given at other times is medicine that we can keep indefinitely.

With the exception of butter, ghee, honey, sugar and molasses, which the Buddha considered ‘medicines’ that monks can keep and consume for up to seven days, all solids are considered to be food. But the Buddha also made exceptions for other ‘medicines.’ (The word for

medicine in Pāli has a much broader meaning than in English.) So certain fruits and roots (rather bitter) can be consumed after midday. But none of the common English fruits come under this heading. This category also includes things such as vitamin pills and other orally taken medicines.

Liquids such as milk, soups, or drinks with food items in them (such as Ovaltine, Horlicks, etc. which have eggs, milk and so on in them) are reckoned to be food. But cocoa, tea, coffee (all without milk) are not.

Fruit juices (as long as they are strained so that they contain no solid matter) are allowable after midday, but they must not be kept overnight. But grapefruit juice, pineapple juice, and coconut milk cannot be taken after noon, because the fruit from which the juice comes can be no larger than one's fist. Orange juice, lemon or lime juice, etc. is okay (though Thais have yet to see the size of a good Jaffa orange).

If various items are mixed together, it depends on what the ingredients are as to whether it is allowable or not after midday. Thus plain, dark chocolate is allowable after midday, but milk chocolate is considered food.

Jane's Recollections

The advice Acharn Paññā gave for maintaining *ānāpānasati* in all activities of my daily life (as opposed to just when sitting in meditation) was really helpful. It's much easier to get focused when I'm watching with interest to see what the breathing is doing.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
October 1967

Dear Jane,

Sorry I have not sent you any notes recently, but as you probably saw yesterday afternoon, I am busy with multiple affairs. But I'm not complaining, for it helps me to develop patience and to reduce 'self-interest.'

As far as I know, nobody has done a translation of Tan Acharn Mun's *Muttodaya* (one may translate this as "the attaining of freedom"). I have a copy here in Thai and have the intention to translate it, but so far have not had time. Unfortunately, this book was probably not written by Tan Acharn Mun, but rather by one of his disciples. For that reason, I have not taken it as seriously as I otherwise might. In addition, Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, who of course knew Tan Acharn Mun very well, is not overly impressed by *Muttodaya* – although I don't think he actually disputes it. It's a bit difficult to work on translations now, because I have rather a lot of things to do, and also my own practice to see to as well. Actually, I am thinking of asking Tan Acharn for permission to go

out on my own later this year (or early next) because I find rather too many distractions in the Wat. But please don't think I am criticising this Wat, for it is an excellent training place, and the distractions here are far less than one would find in most Wats.

I was very glad that Khun Ying Sermsri came here for a while. She is a very good and friendly person who has a great deal of *saddhā* in Buddhism and in the good teachers.

Tan Cherry tells me you want to borrow a copy of *On Trust in the Heart*, so I am sending it along to you. It is one of the Mahāyāna sutras which, although I can see the truth of it, and the value of it, still does not 'jell' (I think that's the right term). But this is an individual matter and it may jell with you.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

October 1967

Dear Jane,

Nid brought your camera to me this evening. Although it was very kind of you to give it to him, I'm afraid it is too much for him. He is very good hearted, but he's not very clever and lacks the ability and the education to use a sophisticated camera of this sort. If it was just the type that you point and press the button (like a Box Brownie), he might be able to master it. But stops, speeds, hyper focal distances, etc. are far beyond him. In addition, an expensive camera may be a hazard to him as Baan Taad is still quite a wild place. Because of that, he has decided to give it back to you. I did not make him do it, but he probably sees that he would not be able to use it and trying to sell it may be quite an embarrassment for a village boy. Also, you are in a position to turn this camera to good use if you can photograph some of the things that you see here as a way of illustrating the way things are done in a forest monastery. In that way, your group and others can be prepared for the time when the Saṅgha comes to England.

As to the *asubha* practice: yes, you can develop it on your own body, but this practice is not used for developing the perception of *anattā*, so just keep it to the loathsomeness aspect. I checked with Tan Acharn on this and he said *anattā* is very high and too subtle. One must first see the loathsomeness aspect, which is gross.

It is quite important that you do not allow your *kilesas* to (so to speak) palm you off with a very shallow, incomplete level of detachment from the body, because that would be false and would not give you the desired results. Also, were you to truly and suddenly see the real *anattā* of the body, the shock might be too much for you. The best way is to gradually erode away your attachment by perceiving the body's loathsomeness again and again until your *citta* can slip into the acceptance of *anattā* without shock. But you will probably feel a resistance to perceiving loathsomeness in the body (which only proves that it is the right way) and the overcoming of that resistance is hard work.

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

November 1967

Dear Jane,

I was very glad to hear that you've torn up your notes. Notes are so often a way of clinging to the past by unconsciously attempting to fix permanently what is impermanent.

I hope you didn't mention the suicide business to Ian, otherwise he may be a bit upset. The problem with talk about suicide is that it's always very difficult to assess how serious a person actually is. Even a joke about suicide means that the idea is there in the mind, and it may spring from a depth of intention that the person is quite unaware of, even in themselves. The best way to counter it is to recognise when the idea of suicide has arisen, however weakly or jokingly, and then try to search for its causes in oneself.

I am a little uncertain about setting a date for your departure. It would be no good asking Tan Acharn, for he would just ask you in turn when you must return home. You said originally that you would stay until

after the Kaṭhina ceremony, which Tan Acharn says will be before the end of the month. So I suggest the end of the month or the first few days of next month as being suitable. This is only a suggestion as there is no reason why you shouldn't stay longer if you want – or can. The important thing is that the date you decide to leave should be determined only after reasoned consideration, and not based merely on desires or emotions.

I hope all is continuing to go well.

Paññā

P.S. The paraffin stove is one that Nid found in the kitchen, so I cleaned it up and got it working. If there is any trouble please send it over to the repairs department.

Jane's Recollections

I admit I did have suicidal tendencies after doing a lot of visualisation of death and the subsequent disintegration of the body. It was as though my mind seemed to shrivel with the corpse. There was no warmth in my heart, even for my teachers, and I physically shivered with cold. It seemed shaming that so much time and money had been wasted on what appeared, at that time, to be a dead end.

Thankfully, the bad mood didn't last long, perhaps thanks to doing a Recollection of the Buddha. Often when you are beginning to wonder what on earth you are doing all this for, it is helpful to go back to the beginning and do some chanting and Sutta reading.

My dear husband wrote to me every evening on an airmail lettercard and posted it on his way to the office. I would save them up for a time when I hoped they would cause the least disturbance. This was very often around the mealtime when the letters would compete with my greed for food, which in those days was quite a problem! The worst time to read them was in the early evening around dusk when I was struggling against loneliness and homesickness anyway. I found the best cure for that was to get everything ready for bed, mosquito net up, shutters

closed, candles and matches at the ready, and then do walking meditation practice until it was too dark to see the path.

On later retreats, the letters would be saved up for the flight home when the food was being handed out. As I was still observing the Eight Precepts and thus could not eat after midday, the letters from Ian became a reward for abstaining from the tempting food on offer.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1967

Dear Jane,

Your irrational feeling of the possible need to bolt for safety is almost certainly due to practice and is not connected with external events; that is to say, an internal feeling is being projected outward and rationalised externally. You should examine this carefully so as not to be caught unawares by such feelings. And remember, if the ego gets desperate it can also start creating *nimittas* to reinforce the feeling that you need to 'escape.'

Actually, I seriously doubt there is any danger in this Wat, particularly while Tan Acharn is here. All of the villagers, even those who don't like him, have a very healthy respect for him and keep clear. Also, don't go by the brigand-like appearance of some of the villagers – they are usually the best of people. The ones to be suspicious of are the youths in good clothes, long hair and loaded with cheap scent, but they never bother with the Wat. Since I've been here there have been no dangerous incidents at all.

I am enclosing Ian's letter for you to see – I must say he is very good and uncomplaining about your coming here.

All for now, I must go to work.

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

November 1967

Dear Jane,

I have told Tan Acharn that you want to ask some questions as soon as he has spare time.

It is really very kind of you to offer me the opportunity to stay in your outside Shrine Room at Crabwood, particularly as I know that you like to do your practice there. But I'm afraid I am not yet ready to return to England. One of the things I want to try is to wander as a mendicant monk, because the training in independence and freedom to come and go is invaluable. I am quite sure that someone who has enough faith could wander with a bowl and tent in England, but Thailand is an easier place to start off and to train oneself. The day may well come before long, however, when I shall be glad of the shelter of your Shrine Room.

You must be a bit careful about the dictatorialness of your *citta*. The following, more or less, summarizes what you should be careful in:

Never react to an impulse without first recollecting and checking it with your intellect and rational understanding.

If you then see that it is good or at least harmless and does not contradict or otherwise disorganise what you are doing, then obey the impulse – but mindfully!

If it is false, or wrong or harmful or wilfully distracting you, then resist it – also mindfully!

The important thing is that you should be in control of yourself and not at the mercy of irrational impulses. But one can deliberately act on those impulses as long as they are not harmful.

Be most suspicious and careful of anything that tells you things and gives you information in any ‘psychic’ manner. If a person gets caught in this snare, the information is often correct to start with, but later on it turns into pure fantasy and can veer toward paranoia or schizoid tendencies. In all these things, your most valuable and reliable faculty is your normal rational functions and intellect. The ‘psychic’ functions

can, however, be very valuable as long as they are always checked by reason, so you must not disparage them too much.

Yours,

Paññā

P.S. I can't think why Tan Acharn should be proud of me. My practice is awful – as usual!

Jane's Recollections

It's rather amazing that monks are now able to go on *tudong* in England. Acharn Sucitto, the Abbot of Chithurst Buddhist Monastery wandered for three months on his own in the West Country a couple of years ago.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

November 1967

Dear Jane,

If you really want to return at the same time as Maṅgalo, I doubt whether Tan Acharn will object, but why? So far the only intimation I have that things are not going well is via a letter from you in which you talk of hanging yourself. You talk of you disposing of a photo of Tan Acharn, and say it feels unbearable that you have wasted other people's time and money.

Something tells me that the one in charge at present is not Jane but a demon that is desperately trying to remain in charge. It is a very wilful demon that would prefer to destroy your present five *khandhas* by suicide rather than be tamed and give up its authority – and what sort of state would that lead to? It could hardly be a good one.

In Buddhism we are not aiming to become saints, nor to attach labels to ourselves like 'Arahant,' but just to become normal people who have straightened out the crookedness in our hearts. We are aiming to tame

that demon (*kilesas*) so that we can lead ordinary lives happily, and not at the dictates of a mass of emotions, sensations and other influences all jumbled up in the most fearful tangle. Surely, this is our birthright, so to speak, and not some exalted special state such as the word ‘saint’ brings to mind. But to get to this state of normality you will have to fight and defeat the demon. At present, you have the ideal opportunity to do just that. You have now come face to face with the demon, you have skill in using the weapons of meditation, you have the protection and help of a most excellent teacher and the good will of all the rest of us. But in the end, it is you who must clench your teeth and set up the determination to go on, however difficult it may be and however long it may take. You may find it helpful to contemplate the unhappiness and hopelessness of most of the people you know in England. They live their lives doing their daily routine, which is performed only to continue with the business of living, and for no higher purpose. They don’t know where all this is leading them, even though inwardly they have a longing for something better. What that is, they don’t know; but we can call it happiness and Dhamma.

Do you want to return and go back to that state of hopeless longing?

Here is the opportunity to break this vicious circle of *samsāra* forever.

You can cure not only yourself, but perhaps be able to help cure some of the hopelessness of others in England. So please do strive to develop your practice. If you find that the body contemplation is bringing too much *dukkha*, drop it for the time being and do *ānāpānasati*, or just repeat *buddho* in your heart. Remember that nearly all your present troubles arise just because of THINKING. So replace those thoughts with a continuous repetition of *buddho* in the heart. Try that to see if it works.

Finally, when problems arise, please don't hesitate to write to me about them. I know well how an 'atmosphere of seclusion' can become depressing at times. I used to get caught in moods like that a lot at one time, until I realised that they were just feelings. I found that if I refrained from getting caught up in them I could begin to pare away at my conceit. At times I still get caught, though not so much now – but I fear I still have an awful lot of conceit to get rid of.

Please keep in mind that we all have *mettā* for you, and also *karuṇā*, and that if you can deal with your present demon, we will then have – *muditā*.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

November 1967

Dear Jane,

Yesterday I went to Udon Thani with Tan Acharn. It was all rather tiresome as Udon is not the most pleasant of towns at present. Tan Acharn said he wants to have another talk with you, but guests and other obligations have prevented it.

This morning we walk *piṇḍapāta* round the *sālā*, and crowds of people will come because today is the end of rains retreat. Come along if you would like, but if you prefer to avoid the crowds nobody will be offended.

With regard to what I said yesterday morning, rather briefly, in the *sālā*: you must never give all authority to the dictates of your *citta* (or rather that aspect of your *citta* which we call emotions or feelings). That would lead to disaster. It's comparable to parents giving one hundred percent authority to their children. Your normal, rational assessment of what is right and appropriate must be the authority until such time as your

citta is so purified that you can relinquish your authority to it – like parents who steadily give more and more authority to their children as they grow into adults. Doing what is right and appropriate in each situation is also the way of *satipaṭṭhāna* and the way of Dhamma. When your mind is always in the present, it is coolly and clearly aware of everything in your environment, both the external and the internal.

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1967

Dear Jane,

I asked Tan Acharn about the *brahmavihāras* and he answered that the *brahmavihāras* arise in the *citta* in the same way that the *kilesas* arise, but they are the opposing factions to the *kilesas*, that is, the *brahmavihāras* are positive, the *kilesas* negative. This is, of course, not a complete answer – perhaps you should treat it like a Zen Koan.

Please, you must not think that my practice is very good, or that I can attain *samādhi* whenever I want, or even easily. I wish that I could, but I still have a lot of *kilesas* to overcome before I really know the whole story.

If you wish to ask Tan Acharn questions on practice, please don't be afraid to do so. But when you phrase them, please make allowances for my rather inadequate ability to translate them into Thai.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1967

Dear Jane,

I have asked Tan Acharn your questions. The answers are as follows:

The in and out breaths are just *sankhāras* and are both to be known by the knower. When they become one, they are just the rising and ceasing of *kāya-sankhāras*. The knower does not arise and cease, but is always there – though usually more or less obscured by the *kilesas*.

Sensuous craving can turn into craving for fine-material existence as the *citta* becomes progressively more subtle, because craving for fine-material existence is more subtle than sensuous craving.

In the fine-material sphere achieved through *jhāna*, the *citta* is more subtle and has greater potential for dealing with lust. Also the more subtle the *citta*, the more attenuated the greed becomes.

The important thing is not to look to the future, but Tan Acharn says that you are going in the right direction. As to the final dispelling of the *kilesas*, it will depend on your ability in the future, when you get to

that point. Tan Acharn also said that the point you have reached is good and in the right direction. You must now learn to become skilled in attaining that point.

Tan Acharn says don't worry about a lack of worldly talents – talent in doing practice is all that he is concerned with.

Love and devotion are always necessary. But you must not become confused by the Western idea that love and devotion are important in helping other people. Love and devotion are, in fact, essential attitudes within yourself.

When you write questions, would you try and make them as clear as possible, because some of your questions are very difficult to understand.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

November 1967

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn said that the knower is the *citta*. It is also 'Buddha,' for the inherent nature of the *citta* is, amongst other things, 'knowledge' (not intellectual, but direct). When the *citta* is infused with *kilesas*, they gum up the works (so to speak). In addition, to maintain the *citta* in a state of knowing, it is necessary to have *sati* and *paññā* surrounding and guarding it. Tan Acharn suggested that you may be mixing up the *knower* and *sati-paññā*, mistaking the one for the other.

As for love and devotion, Tan Acharn said that whether it actually influences others is not very important. What is essential is that, by developing them, you should be developing your own *citta* at the same time. He also stressed that when love and devotion completely fill your heart, you will inherently have no concern whether or not they influence others (*upekkhā*).

Tan Acharn mentioned that there is knowledge that you should develop

and knowledge that you should not: knowledge that is good and in accordance with Dhamma should be promoted, whereas knowledge of evil and of unnecessary mundane subjects should be shunned. I suspect that you are harking back to Christian ideas that too much wisdom is a bad thing. According to the basic Christian views, that may be so, but it does not apply in Buddhism. What does apply in Buddhism is that an imbalance between wisdom and faith is a hindrance for the proper development of *samādhi*, that is, both should be developed together. But there is no real limit to wisdom in the practice of Dhamma.

Two days ago I went round the boundary of the wat with another bhikkhu and a *sāmaṇera*. The boundary is 1.9 kilometres long. It took us four hours to walk the whole distance, mainly because nearly three quarters of it is in thick jungle, which made for very hard going. At times I felt a bit like Stanley penetrating the impenetrable jungles of Africa.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

On the plane journey home I wrote down a list of all the things I'd learnt from this visit that could be shared with the Hampshire Buddhist Society members on my return.

- To develop a love of the Buddha.
- The value of *pūjā*.
- To know the Suttas reasonably well.
- Preparedness.
- Never speak, act or even think without reflecting on whether the result could be harmful to others or oneself.
- To have a reasonable rational explanation for everything one does.
- The value of Tidiness.
- Strengthen the heart position of the mind.
- The value of meditation on the 32 parts of the body.
- To practice *ānāpānasati* diligently, but to also develop *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy in the success of others and equanimity).

- Keep things in one's head rather than on paper.
- That the Buddha-Dhamma works in the same way as nature, and providing that one follows the teaching, the good results of reducing one's suffering will come, slowly and inexorably.
- Animals can be real friends in times of danger or distress.
- The value of patience, perseverance and tolerance.

There is a lot mentioned in my notebooks about the different kinds of happiness I encountered – sometimes bubbly, sometimes crystal clear, and sometimes serene in the knowledge that 'Dhamma works.'

The day of my departure I started packing and tidying up my room in the small hours of the morning. I said my goodbyes and went up to the *sālā* with a tray of offerings for Tan Acharn: hankies, incense and candles. No one was in the *sālā* but Tan Cherry, who was sweeping the floor. He pointed to the shrine room and told me about the main Buddha Rūpa and explained who the Acharns were in the photos hanging behind the Buddha.

I then sat and waited for half an hour expecting Tan Acharn to come and say a few words, perhaps even give me a little praise for my endurance, if nothing else! Suddenly some visitors arrived. Tan Acharn soon appeared and began talking

to them down below. Acharn Paññā took pity on me and came over to give me encouragement. When the jeep arrived to drive me to town, Tan Acharn called out as I was waved into the passenger seat. I put my tray of offerings on the seat and did my three bows on the sharp gravel while the driver offered my tray to Tan Acharn for me. All Tan Acharn said was “Do your best” as I was driven away feeling rather crestfallen.

On the way to Udon Thani we encountered a roadblock and my heart sank. Was I going to be abducted? It turned out to be a small party of Boy Scouts collecting for something! Perhaps unwisely, I had a sleeper compartment on the train for the night journey to Bangkok. The guard somehow conveyed to me that I must keep the door locked whatever happened until we got there. Sure enough, when we stopped at a big town on the way (Khon Kaen), some men shouted and banged on the door of my compartment trying to get in. Mercifully they gave up and went away and I arrived safely in Bangkok.

*Wat Pa Baan Taad
20th December, 1967*

Dear Jane,

I see that today is your mother's seventieth birthday, so we hope that in her old age she may be happy and healthy – though the photo you sent of her makes her look remarkably young for 70. Actually, there is no formal way in which we send blessings to individual people. But by virtue of the fact that you are a follower of Tan Acharn, your mother automatically comes within his influence – not just on special occasions, but all the time. You may well find that your mother's attitude to Buddhism (which I know was rather 'anti' at one time) has steadily become softer and more relaxed and accepting, which may well be partly, or wholly, due to Tan Acharn's influence. Think how easily her attitude could have gone in the opposite direction.

I don't know quite why, but Tan Acharn never mentioned a word about meeting the Dalai Lama when he returned from Bangkok. We suspect that he did, because he brought back an autographed booklet written by the Dalai Lama. But not a word. Perhaps he thought it was

unnecessary to tell us Westerners, and the Thai monks know nothing about the Dalai Lama anyway.

When you next see them please give Jhānananda and Pat. W. my regards and tell them that they are not forgotten.

Freda suddenly sent me letters suggesting that I was in need of a long rest and should go to an island in the Hebrides next summer. I am very puzzled that she suddenly thought I was so badly in need of a rest. I wonder if you have any knowledge about all this.

Please don't blame yourself for not understanding the advice that Tan Acharn gave while you were here. Tan Acharn is much more concerned that your mind be open and receptive so that what you hear goes in. As long as it has gone in, it will then come up as 'understanding' when one is 'ripe' for it – maybe years afterwards. But the important thing is that it has been absorbed.

I hope the blizzards in England have subsided by now. We've had a few days (or rather nights) of cold weather and in the mornings we are all shivering at 6°C (43°F). This is not cold in England, but we are hardly equipped for even this temperature. The big woolly pullover that Freda sent is superb and the neck is large enough that I can wear it in the *sālā*,

leaving the right shoulder bare. But in my hut I cover both shoulders.

Please give my regards to Ian and I hope you all have a happy Christmas and New Year.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

It was good to hear that Tan Acharn's influence was likely to encompass my family too. It might well have been why they no longer seemed to feel that my faith in Buddhism was a threat to them. In fact, Ian always said he was very proud of the fact that I was a Buddhist and, rather to my embarrassment, would announce it to all and sundry whether they might be interested or not.

My mother would say things like, "I am sure that nice old man in Thailand would not want you to be so hard on yourself." After she had a stroke and came to live with us, I read her the Biography of Phra Acharn Mun, which she really seemed to enjoy.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

3rd January, 1968

Dear Jane,

First of all – Happy New Year to you and all your family. Second, thanks for your letter and for the stamps and air letters you sent for us. In consequence, I am sending this correspondence as an ordinary letter. The only snag is that I don't know how many stamps to put on it; airmail rates in Thailand are both more expensive and more complex to calculate than in England.

Some time ago a member of your group wanted to print an article I wrote ages ago on *mettā* meditation. I wonder if he ever finished printing it; if so, I should be grateful if you would ask him to send out about a dozen copies. I was rather interested to hear that a member of your group was previously a Sufi. I've been sent three books relating to the Sufis recently, and am curious to learn more about their system. The 'taste' of Sufism is not, however, that of Dhamma; and I could

find nothing in the books to indicate that their goal was the same as ours. Sufism seems to be thoroughly wedded to Islam and as such is a completely theistic system.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

It was difficult to write to Ian from the Wat – there seemed to be so little common ground and time was precious. While I was there it only felt right to be walking or sitting!

When I got home re-adjusting to normal life was always hard after living in a forest monastery and being part of the natural order of things. Soft chairs and hot baths felt suffocating, my clothes restricting. Ian was quite extraordinarily understanding and patient, even to the extent of taking much of the strain of running the house upon himself until my readjustment took place. The animals were a great comfort; in fact, at first I felt closer to them than to humans!

Even though returning home after a retreat was difficult at first, it was always worth it in the way that I was able to simplify problems if they occurred, and in the way I was calmer and had a feeling of detachment from all that was happening.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

23rd February, 1968

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't written before, but it gets steadily more difficult to get my pen out and write. I suppose it's just laziness, but I also get the feeling that I really have very little of value to write about. (This may be a hangover from childhood when at school we had to write home once a week every Sunday, which I always hated!)

Your experience of having a "brain storm" was too vague an account to translate to Tan Acharn. The difficulty occurs in assessing whether what you experienced was emotional feeling, sensation (through the senses), physical, or what. My guess is that your mind became very sharp and 'wide open' to all sensations, which came in so fast that you couldn't (or didn't know how to) cope with them. If so, I think your fault lay in lying down and going to sleep. When one attains such a sharp 'wide open' state, the general rule (I have found – though I hasten to say that this state has not been one of my experiences) is don't lie down, and if you must sleep, do so sleeping in a chair. But really, in such

a case you should search for and locate the ‘one who knows,’ which is not involved in the storm. This means being mindful and detached, which I realise may not be that easy to do so at that time. The fact that a subsequent ‘good practice’ cleared your head, suggests that the above is more or less correct, because the subsequent practice would again raise up the *citta* that the sleep had allowed to gravitate to a rather low level. But don’t bother whether it was physical or mental, as most of such experiences would be classified as psychosomatic.

Why do you need to invite so many speakers to your group? Would it not be possible for each member to do a bit of reading and research on particular aspects of Dhamma so that they can give a short talk about what they have done and found out?

I am afraid Tan Acharn won’t come to England just yet. He has so much work to do out here, and his English is not good enough yet. He does say that he will go when his English is good enough for a trip to be really valuable. I am fairly sure that he really does intend to go to England one day, though probably not while his elderly mother is still alive. In any case, the future of us all here at Wat Pa Baan Taad is full of uncertainty

because of the growing Communist insurgency. We don't know how things will turn out, but I am more or less pessimistic of the long term status quo.

Turning to your two recent letters which just arrived this morning:

How difficult it is for people like Brian Dyas, people who are good and sincere, with not a lot of dust in their eyes, but who have no teacher and lots of family fetters. As always, the real need in Buddhism is for teachers. All else will follow in due time. I owe Brian a letter (which is long overdue) and will suggest that if he has problems in meditation, Tan Acharn may be ready to give some guidance.

No, I haven't met the Chao Khun from East Sheen. I don't go out of my way to visit people while I am in Bangkok. I get too many visitors as it is and I try to avoid more disturbance in my life than is necessary.

Regarding your perceptions of Tan Acharn: a Teacher does not have to be a father figure, although in the majority of cases he is, and it is right that he should be so. The Buddha taught that teacher and pupil should live together looking on each other as father and son. This is stated in the Vinaya. So if you look on Tan Acharn as a father figure, there is nothing wrong in that. Actually, Tan Acharn as a father figure is a

projection which stands externally for the teacher within yourself. And the replacement of Tan Acharn by your internal teacher takes place when you reach maturity in the Dhamma, just as the guidance of parents is replaced by their child's own abilities when he reaches adulthood.

Your frustration that you “can't get it across to people how vital it is for them to practise this path for their own salvation” is simply a manifestation of the first two Noble Truths. Your desire that others should practise to attain salvation is *taṇhā*, which is the origin of dukkha and the cause of your frustration. Indeed, you've hit the nail right on the head and found the answer when you say, “I don't see how I can teach anyone anything unless they come to me and ask questions.”

The Buddha taught that the Dhamma is *ehi-passiko-dhamma*, meaning a “come and see for yourself Dhamma.” It's a Dhamma that the practitioner must first attain. Later, others who are able to understand and are interested will come and take a look. Then they will ask and be ready to listen. It is not good trying to push the Dhamma onto people, because it spoils the teaching of Dhamma and easily drives them away.

The most skilful way is not to teach Dhamma until someone asks, then answer them, but don't say too much, so that their curiosity still remains.

I hope all these letters reach you. We are probably returning to Udon tomorrow and will be thankful to get out of Bangkok. Tan Cherry's mother has been here for about a week and has now gone off to Australia.

Please excuse my writing but my pen – though a very good one – does not suit these air letter forms.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

'Brain storms' were probably the result of trying to combine long hours of meditation with an extremely full life. It would have been far better to have just done half an hour's walking practice, had a good night's rest and made a big effort to be more mindful during the day. However, Tan Acharn seemed to think "the practice was going in the right direction and it was all quite normal."

Brian Dyas took over the Hampshire Buddhist Society after I left for Cornwall. I went to his funeral a few years ago. He was very good to the monks at Chithurst when they first arrived, lending them tents and taking them food offerings.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

11th May, 1968

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn was interested in your meditation experiences in which you saw the parts of the body as the elements and said it was the right way. He commented that you must come to see the loathsome nature of the body and its various parts, but at the same time you must keep in mind that the *citta* itself is not loathsome. To your comment, “The body became terrified and icy cold, but the knower was quite indifferent to the fear,” Tan Acharn said, “Yes, that’s right” and indicated definite approval. With regard to the feeling of disintegration, he said that the body may disintegrate (he may mean that it feels that way, or perhaps by virtue of *anicca*, it is, truly speaking, disintegrating all the time), but the *citta* does not.

He suggested that your unpleasant dreams were probably in the nature of *nimittas* associated with the practice. As to how you should continue, Tan Acharn said to go on with your investigation of the body in combination with *ānāpānasati*. Moving on to your second letter, Tan

Acharn commented that seeing the emptiness of the body was correct and good, as long as it is in connection with one of the *ti-lakkhaṇa* or the loathsomeness practice.

However, Tan Acharn did say that you should be able to see the loathsomeness and *ti-lakkhaṇa* in other people's bodies more easily than in your own, and when you see them in your own body, they should appear quite clear and obvious in other people's bodies. My own experience also tends to confirm this. An important point Tan Acharn made was this: you can gauge the purity of your *citta* by the extent to which you see your body as loathsome. He went on to say that contemplating the loathsomeness of the body can be likened to using a grindstone to sharpen and polish the *citta*, removing impurities and obscurities (the 32 body parts being the stone).

I would suggest that you examine the situation carefully before going in for another week of practice at home. This is because of Ian who is not in a position to understand what is going on, and who is likely to get very worried – which can only lead to anxiety and future troubles. In fact, you must try to see Ian's viewpoint and make a lot of allowances for it. I also feel that ten hours a day may be rather too much without a teacher available to guide you, though perhaps Tan Acharn can help without his being actually there.

I agree with your feeling that it would be bad to publish your notes on meditation experiences. Quite apart from personal considerations, your notes would not be of much help to others. Really speaking, people must find their own way and should not be fed a lot of preconceived ideas about what should happen in meditation that are derived from the experiences of other people – which are almost sure to be characteristically unsuited to them. When people in your group say they are desperately searching for first-hand experiences, it reminds me of the Zen master who said that many of his students were like goats, nosing everything and gobbling up everything that they could find, without any sense of discrimination.

With regard to your leading a beginners' class in meditation, I suggest that you try to avoid anything which makes other people put you in the position of their 'teacher,' for this could have a bad effect on your practice. Also, beware of the strong tendency people have of elevating the teacher to a 'higher plane.' You must then behave according to the standards expected of a teacher, which you probably know nothing about. Sooner or later you will disappoint your students in some way and you will have no idea what all the fuss is about. All this is not very important and is just a bit foolish, but the 'psychic link' (I don't know

what else to call it) that is formed between teacher and pupil is no joke if your *citta* is not strong enough to stand the strain. I reckon this is the primary reason why members of the Saṅgha who have returned to England to teach have sooner or later deteriorated and failed – or broken away before it was too late (as I managed to do). I see no harm in simply telling people what to do and how to do it; for instance, how to sit and how to practise *ānāpānasati*. But I would advise great caution when they bring experiences to you and ask what they mean. Generally, when they relate experiences about becoming more mindful, calm and bright, you can indicate to them they are going in the right direction.

I may be off to Luang Por¹¹ Bua's Wat for a few weeks – my annual vacation! He is another very fine teacher from the same school as Tan Acharn. He is very old now and can neither read nor write, which is excellent – not a scholar!

Paññā

11. Luang Por (Thai: หลวงพ่อ) means 'Venerable Father' and is an informal title that refers to a very senior monk.

Jane's Recollections

Once again Acharn Paññā advised to concentrate on the loathsomeness of the body. Evidently he could see that sensuality was still my greatest stumbling block. So it remained, as on my very last visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad in 2010, Tan Acharn's sister Khun Mae Chan Dee, who was reputed to be an Arahant, said that that contemplation was what I should be doing! That particular *kilesa* is certainly very tenacious.

It was very interesting to read Acharn Paññā's description of how *vipassanā* works: it is not just one flash of insight but a steady wearing away of ignorance by repeatedly bringing the three signs to mind. When I did get a rare insight I would bask in the sense of freedom it left me with and then I'm afraid forget about it.

Other people's meditation experiences, like their dreams, are quite boring to everyone except the person who had them! It is sheer self-indulgence to talk about them, except possibly to one's meditation teacher, and even he or she must be very patient to put up with it.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

24th June, 1968

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn says thank you very much for sending the parcel of sweets and food. I am glad to hear that my letter to Ian was reassuring, for it is rather difficult to explain the ways of Dhamma and meditation practice when he doesn't know enough to understand any of the technical issues. As such, all I could do was to tell him that Tan Acharn was not worried about the issues that come up in your practice – in fact, he said it was quite normal.

With regard to the danger of 'fear' in practice: as I understand it, fear is not too dangerous until it gets very strong – and the danger then is panic. Normally, fear still has an element of self-control in it. But as the fear grows stronger, the one who is in control is tempted to give way and allow the emotions (one's powerful, lower, irrational nature) to take charge. When the 'controller' gives way to the power of one's irrational emotions, one slips into a state of panic, which then compels one to rush for an escape, quite regardless of whether the direction

taken is effective, suitable or moral. One of the great dangers with fear is that although the external, initiating stimulus may be very slight, the irrational emotions build it up, until in the end, a human being (or even an elephant) can run in panic from a mouse.

I'm glad you find that the new edition of *Wisdom Develops Samādhi* has more clarity. I have had confirmation of its accuracy from Tan Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhaṇa of Wat Bovornives (my Upajjhāya), who after reading it through in English brought up only two small points of doubt.

You mentioned a state of mind which occurred to you on the full moon day in January. Actually, a state like that which quickly comes and goes is in itself not very important unless it gives rise to some constant and positive change of character. Such states must be attained, not once, but time after time, until they become normal, and then they really do become useful. Also, it is almost impossible to assess what state the mind is in until one has done it time after time, and one is able to reflect and sort out the different characteristics and levels of each state.

I suspect you see your own body as loathsome and not necessarily those of other people, since you do the contemplation of the body only when you are seated in meditation, when you focus on your own body, as you should. But later, as a result of that practice, the experience of

loathsomeness should well up naturally from inside you, without you having to make any particular effort. Then that new way of viewing the body should begin to occur when looking at other people as well (or even when you are merely thinking about them). For example, you are cooking breakfast and idly thinking of Mrs. Jones, when an image comes to mind of her walking down the road. Suddenly one's mind focuses into the image and sees that what you call Mrs. Jones is a bodily form, and that what walks down the road is just a lot of bones, sinews, meat, skin - all wobbling like jelly. In that way you come to see the fruits of your continuous focus on body contemplation reflected in the people around you. This is the direction your practice should be headed in.

Thanks very much for sending the *Three Pillars of Zen*. I haven't yet read it, but will soon.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

If I can be allowed a little self-indulgence: in case it seems as if it was all doom and gloom for me, there were meditation sessions that went really well and I wondered why they didn't happen more often. It is difficult to describe a 'good' *samādhi* meditation except to say that the mind appears to be fully integrated, seamless and totally content, as though that was how it was meant to be. It was a vindication that the method of training worked. Perhaps it was a practice session like that which occurred on that full moon day in January 1968, and which I hoped to repeat.

The good results of *samādhi* practice have a different quality from the happiness that arises after a good insight meditation session. That happiness seems to originate from an area of coolness and stillness which rises up spontaneously, erasing all but the knowing that remains aware of what is happening. You could call it a black hole of wisdom!

Admittedly, neither of these states has occurred to me very often. But my recollections of them must be what keeps me going, along with the increasing detachment from the impact of the many vicissitudes of life.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

7th October, 1968

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't written for ages, but I have been writing very few letters recently. There seems to be little point in writing a lot unless a lot needs to be said. But you mustn't think that you are forgotten, or that I have no interest.

Firstly, Tan Acharn asks me to thank you for sending out that beautiful scarf. It will no doubt be very useful in the cold weather, which will be coming soon. And thank you for sending the photographs of your family and your Shrine Room. Tan Acharn said that if the wall photo at the left-hand edge of the photo is one of him, then it should not be there as it is higher than Tan Acharn Mun's photo.

I suggest that you consider that all situations in which you have an environmental boundary are in a sense 'imprisonments,' which means all situations in which you are attached to body and mind (i.e. the five *khandhas*). To realise what this means, reflect on where on this planet

would be a safe place to live if a Third World War broke out. With nuclear radiation, nerve gas, and disease warfare there would be no safe haven on earth. Consequently, you would tend to feel trapped. But this is only the case for those who firmly believe that the body is self and cling to it as such. For them, the whole world is a prison. Suicide is no way out – in fact, it is very bad *kamma* because it is opposed to Dhamma, because it makes a refuge of death instead of making the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha the refuge in one's own heart. In the truest sense, Dhamma is the way of life (genuine life), not death.

I can't help feeling that one of your problems is in how you relate to other people. For instance, you find it difficult meeting new people because you must find out what corner of your inner environmental pattern can conveniently accommodate them. This is complicated when the people who are already there in your inner environment start acting (in the external world) in ways that make you constantly adjust that familiar pattern in your own mind to new events and activities, which leaves you no peace – hence *dukkha*. The only way out is to cut the whole tangle with the sword of wisdom, to see it all as a hopeless mess which you cannot sort out because it involves other people who are half (or wholly) crazed with greed, hatred and delusion. What you can deal with is yourself, thus by preventing your thoughts from

going out to other people, that crazy tangle becomes just an external nuisance and not something attached to your heart. Ask yourself often, “What is the extent of my present *dukkha*?” Then reflect that “The past has gone, so there is no *dukkha* there; the future hasn’t come, so there is no *dukkha* there; that which is distant is not here, so there is no *dukkha* there. All my *dukkha* is right here now; so what is it, where is it and how much is it?” Reflecting in this way, you may find that the amount of *dukkha* you must put up with is not so overwhelming as you thought.

I suggest you give up all ideas about ‘karmic relationships’ because they will lead your thoughts into endless speculations, which only increase your involvement in the social tangle. If you like, think of hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, etc., then look at ‘karmic relationships’ and see whether bones are related to bones or skin to skin. The whole question starts to look a bit empty.

I have never been able to develop an enthusiasm for the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, although I have read it through (twice I believe), but the Tibetans regard it very highly so this is probably just my nature and background, which it does not suit.

If you really want to, you can take the Bodhisattva vow, but I advise you to do so in the way that the sixth Zen Patriarch recommended, that is,

“I vow to liberate all beings in my own mind, however many they may be.” Any other way strikes me as nonsense, and can lead to conceit.

Yes, I would also like to help my mother and lead her to Dhamma, but even Sāriputta only managed to help his mother right at the end of his life. All I can do is to wait patiently for my mother to ask questions, but I am afraid she is getting too old and set in her ways now.

Towards the end of the year I expect I shall go to stay in Luang Por Bua’s *wat* for a while. I have always liked him and want to see his *wat* and learn from him. He is one of the few teachers who Tan Acharn recommends unreservedly. He is the one who cannot read or write.

Yours,

Paññā

P.S. Tan Acharn asked me to ask you – please not to send us any more things from England because we are finding increasing difficulty with the customs authorities. I think there have been so many parcels (mostly from Canada and USA) that the customs are beginning to clamp down. At one time they were very lenient, but not now.

Jane's Recollections

I think this letter must have been written after a Buddhist Society Summer School where the Ven. Chime Rinpoche was representing the Tibetan Buddhist School. In spite of the tragedy that had befallen their country, Tibetans always seem so buoyant and happy, full of laughter.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
19th December, 1968

Dear Jane,

I have been busy translating one of Tan Acharn's *desanās* and so am a bit behind with letters. I have finished the *desanā* now and have sent it off to Philip to get copies typed out. I have asked him to send two to you, one for yourself, and one for your Thai friend, whom I would be very pleased if you could ask to check and point out as many translation errors as she can. She has the Thai script, for it was the second one on that sheet of *précis* translating which she did.

In the same letter you say you are "bedevilled by the paradox that all sensation is suffering, and yet one goes on creating more conditions for its arising." Two things are important here: firstly, all sensation is *dukkha* and thus unsatisfactory. Although sensation brings suffering, not all sensation is unpleasant, for it is divided into pleasant and unpleasant, with the bias in favour of the unpleasant. But people crave for the pleasant sensations and crave to get rid of the unpleasant sensations, so they act in ways which they believe will bring that about.

But because they have *avijjā* they think, speak and act in the wrong ways, thinking that they are the right ways. The result is always *dukkha*. Secondly, we primarily crave for and cling to our sense of ‘self,’ but the ‘self’ that we cling to is merely a phantom built up of the rapidly changing process of the five *khandhas*. This ‘self’ feeds on sensation, so if sensation ceases we feel a loss of self. Because of that, we crave for pleasant sensation, or if it can’t get it, unpleasant sensation, or any sensation, rather than none at all. Again it reverts back to *avijjā*, for this ‘self’ is the primary agent of *avijjā*. But we must never underestimate how deeply rooted this ‘self’ and *avijjā* are.

As to why some people seem attractive and not others, the main reason involved here is *kamma*, though I suggest that you don’t try delving too far into this yet; just keep the focus on your internal, bare experience and don’t speculate too much. After all, when you say, “How can two projections have any effect on one another if they are both imaginary?” Do you actually see yourself and other people as projections – or is this just theory? You must revert to your actual experiences in these matters.

I’m afraid I cannot make much comment on your idea to adopt a Tibetan child (after all I lack experience in this direction). It obviously

needs careful thinking and planning, but in general I should say it is more *kusala* than *akusala*.

With regard to your question about giving a donation to the Tibetan refugees, it is difficult for me to make any comment. About the most I can say is that you should act as rationally as you are able in assessing the advantages and disadvantages of such a gift. On the other hand, the heart sometimes compels an action which is not apparently rational but subsequently turns out to be right. Actually, Tan Cherry tells me that you wrote to him saying that you have temporarily resolved the issue by giving the Tibetan refugees a reasonably large donation. Congratulations (*anumodanā sādhu*) on your generosity in this matter.

Khun Ying Sermsri showed me a letter in which you said that you felt you'd been disloyal to Tan Acharn by going to other teachers in England. But Tan Acharn never minds any of us going to another teacher, for I can fairly say that his whole concern is that we should progress in Dhamma, however we do it. What he is concerned about is that we should watch and guard our own hearts and avoid any dangers to our hearts by generally being careful and mindful. In other words, it is good to listen to Dhamma teachers speak about various aspects of practice; you may learn a lot from that. But if you find that association

with a teacher produces unskilful states of mind, or is otherwise harmful, then avoid him.

Thanks for the two photos; Jhānananda looks rather old now and I hear she has a lot of difficulty getting around. Please give her my regards and say I often think of her.

Things go on out here much as usual. Nid has now left the Wat and has a job working on the buses between Udon and Bangkok. We see him quite often and he looks very well and affluent, for he gets quite good pay.

All for now. Hope you have a not too hectic time at Christmas and please give my regards and greetings to Ian.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

We didn't adopt a Tibetan child, but my mother and I drove to Amsterdam and rescued a Tibetan monk after dropping my husband off somewhere to sail back to England with friends! We had met the monk at a meeting of The Tibet Society at Eccleston Square where we heard of his plight.

He stayed with us in England until he was given a job with Pestalozzi Village, which cared for refugee children in Sussex. He kept up the practice and vows of a Gelugpa Tibetan monk and many years later was able to return to his family in Lijang, Yunnan Province in Eastern Tibet (now under Chinese occupation). There his family set him up with his own monastery on an island in a lake. We used to exchange Christmas cards, but sadly we haven't heard from him for several years.

Nid was the Wat boy who was so kind to me on my first two visits to Thailand. He eventually ordained and is now an abbot of his own monastery.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

25th February, 1969

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your various letters. Please don't worry about my health, the hernia operation was only a minor affair – only a local anaesthetic and finished in 20 minutes. I was able to walk a few steps within 10 hours. As such, I really lost very little strength and recovered very quickly.

I should like to spend a while in England, as you suggest, but I'm afraid it would not help me. It might raise all sorts of problems with regard to the Vinaya and so, I think the idea is best shelved for the present. But it is very kind of you and Freda to offer to pay my fare to England and back. Actually, when I eventually do go to England I would prefer to keep out of the public eye for a while. As for going to the Gelugas' in Dalhousie, this would probably be fascinating but again fraught with Vinaya problems. Anyway, at present I doubt whether I could give much help – other than teaching English, which I would find very tiresome.

If you decide to visit convicts in prison, I suggest that you examine case histories first and never take on a habitual offender, because by their actions they have proven that they are virtually unteachable. Also from the case histories, assess whether a prisoner is, in the least, likely to be open to help – if not, don't go. One must take a fairly hard line with prisoners because a large percentage are flawed, unpleasant people. The few who are not will usually be incarcerated for the first time, and probably not in the high security prisons. This may all sound uncompassionate, but just think what actions some of these people have done and how much suffering they have caused to good and blameless people in the world.

I think it is very generous of you to give so much money to the Gelugpa Fund. The Buddha always praised generosity as being the first virtue, even coming before *sīla*. The effects of such action should not be underestimated.

You ask “Would you say that this body, with its senses, was entirely designed for reproduction of the species?” – No! The body is composed of the material elements of this earth, and is grasped at by the *citta* to generate a symbol, which is then identified as ‘ME’ due to the fundamental delusion we call *avijjā*. Also, you must not think that

the body was designed. It is an organism which grows, changes and develops under the impulses and pressures of the moment. Although reproduction is a very important part of it, it is not by any means the whole of it.

Insights – if you have to “hang on” to an insight in case you forget it, that is not really a deep insight. Deep insights hit you like the death of a friend – even when you forget about it, you still feel that something’s amiss.

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Ian and I were both very touched by the plight of the refugees from Tibet. When Ian's maiden aunt died leaving him a small legacy, he gave half to me as we often had her to stay. With his blessing it went to the monks from the Drepung Gomang Monastery. Later we adopted one of them and sent yearly donations, which they very sweetly said we must stop when we became old age pensioners!

Wat Pa Baan Taad

10th May, 1969

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't written for some time, but the weather is too hot for any really constructive effort at present.

I am glad you liked the translation of Tan Acharn's *desanā*. It still contains some translation mistakes which will be corrected in due course, but it does give you a fair idea of what he said. The next translation I'm doing is more attuned to lay life as it was given at a funeral attended mainly by lay people. It will probably be a long time before I have all of Tan Acharn's *desanās* translated. There must be about 50 of them in print, and still a lot more on audio cassettes that have yet to be transcribed. At present, I am slowly working through the seven talks that I intend to publish in the first book of translations.

The more I understand of Dhamma the more does 'Western society' look doleful. The problem stems from what kids learn, both at school and at home, where the child is taught the nonsense that its parents and teachers learnt as children, plus additional nonsense that has

been concocted in the present age. And nowadays there is the enormous influence of the telly set in the corner of every home. It is as though society were a huge tangled-up cocoon, the whole thing whirling about without any purpose or direction and nobody in the cocoon knows what is right and what is wrong. People in the cocoon create opinions and theories about almost everything, which they cling to so tightly that before long they start arguing and quarrelling, leading to strikes and student riots and wars. Really, the only sane way is to tiptoe out of this mess while everyone else is too busy quarrelling and fighting to notice!

You will no doubt have heard that Philip Badley will be coming out to join us soon. Khun Ying Sermsri has decided to look after him in a big way, and she has arranged for the Saṅgha Rāja to give him a set of robes.

When you experience feelings of pressure in the head, I suspect it is due to your *citta* wandering out thinking about all sorts of things in the world. Try keeping it inside with *buddho, buddho, buddho...* and cut the constant mental chatter and imaginings. Focus down inside and the pressure should ease. This means all the time, not only when you do formal practice.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

2nd September, 1969

Dear Jane,

I am sorry to hear that you have been unwell with a virus infection – is this partly due to the hot weather that I hear England has had recently?

As to the headaches: you may well be right in saying that it is sensuality getting into the practice. Generally, when trouble like this arises, if you make a thorough examination within yourself to see where the practice is going wrong, the answer will be there – though often one does not like the answer or want to accept it. Because of that, you must be strictly honest with yourself. In the event that no answer comes, then you must see it as the result of *kamma* and accept it with patience. Once when I had a bad headache I lay down and put my attention on watching the headache pain, feeling it more and more precisely at every moment (rather as one would listen to every note and part of a note of music) – without strain, but precisely. After about five minutes the headache disappeared and I felt full of energy and very bright.

I suspect you may be going a bit wrong in the practice by straining too much. To practice rightly you must relax physically and mentally, while at the same time being fully awake and watchful, using just enough effort to ward off distractions which can disturb that cool, calm state. If you experience trouble with sensuality you should try to focus on the loathsomeness of the body, without letting excuses or feelings of repulsion for this practice put you off. You may well find that doing body contemplation brings you better results than *ānāpānasati*. It tends to be less concentrated, more discursive and perhaps more ‘gentle’ – and it is the way of wisdom.

With regard to one of the monks here going to England, frankly I feel quite sure that Tan Acharn would not recommend anyone – not because he does not want to help, but because there is nobody whom he could realistically send. Among the Western monks here, only Tan Khantipālo and myself could do it, and Tan Acharn would hardly recommend either of us because neither of us has enough meditation experience. Of the Thai bhikkhus, none of the meditation monks speak English; and even if they did, how could Tan Acharn persuade them to go to England? A teacher like Tan Acharn can only ask another bhikkhu if he would like to go, but he cannot order a monk to go, even though

he is the teacher. You must understand that the monastic hierarchy of the Saṅgha does not allow for senior monks ordering their juniors to go here or there, unless it applies to the affairs of the monastery in which they live together – and of course, in meditation practice. In other words, bhikkhus have a high regard for each other’s freedom of choice, even though one may be the teacher and the other the student.

You must be patient. In the past there were classic examples of bhikkhus who returned to England to teach before they had been properly trained. The result was loss all round with nothing genuine emerging from it. As such, I could not yet recommend any of the Western bhikkhus going to England to teach what they have only imperfectly understood themselves. But the time will come when well-trained Western bhikkhus will return to England, allowing the Saṅgha there to develop properly. It may not even be so far in the future, but to act before the time is ‘ripe’ would not give good results.

Philip is settling down well and working quite hard, but at 42 he has quite a lot of difficulty with such mundane things as sitting on the floor, kneeling and walking with bare feet.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

It wasn't until 1977 that the Saṅgha came to England in the form of Acharn Sumedho and three other bhikkhus from Tan Acharn Chah's forest monastery in Thailand.

After Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa passed away, his senior Western monk at that time, Acharn Dick Sīlaratano, acquired land in Virginia, USA in 2011 to build the second of Tan Acharn's overseas monasteries. The Forest Dhamma Monastery Saṅgha is growing and now has a large *sālā*, several *kuṭīs*, a kitchen and a bathhouse in place.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

October, 1969

Dear Jane,

I was glad to hear that your strength is returning and assume that by now your glandular fever has cured itself. I doubt whether you will get a direct answer to your request from Tan Acharn as he is working quite hard writing a book and has very little spare time. I talked with him about your request and he seemed to be more or less in agreement with my opinion about this matter, that is, he feels that nobody here is yet able to go back to the West and teach. Of course your request is a reasonable one, but I fear that any bhikkhu who agreed to go back at this time would be too untrained to be really valuable. The point is that a really skilled bhikkhu would never put himself in a position where he was, so to speak, under the dictates of lay people, even though their actions are well meant and well thought out. This must be so, otherwise the Saṅgha would be controlled by lay people and the monks would be ordered about and told what they can, and cannot, do. I am fairly sure that Tan Acharn would never order a well-trained monk to go to England – or anywhere else – because it is the way with *kammaṭṭhāna*

monks to have a very high regard for each other's individual freedom of choice and action (within the Vinaya of course) although he might perhaps suggest to him to do such actions without persuasion. I doubt whether many people know much of the tradition of *kammaṭṭhāna* monks. There are not many in Thailand and they tend to be a bit shy of society and the cities.

I shall send you a copy of the corrected *desanā* that Tan Acharn gave at the funeral of Tan Chao Khun Dhammachedi, his preceptor.

I wonder if you are able to keep up the walking meditation? Have you ever tried the repetition of *buddho*? It can be equally as effective as *ānāpānasati* and sometimes more so as it tends to arouse *saddhā*. *Buddho* was the practice that Tan Acharn gained success with when he first attained deep *samādhi*. He had practised *ānāpānasati* for some time, but without it going very deep. Then when it became more difficult, he gave it up and did *buddho* instead.

Have you seen the latest Pāli Text Society edition of the *Theragāthā* (Verses of the Elders) translated by K. R. Norman? It is very good and I suggest you get a copy if you have not already.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

21st January, 1970

Dear Jane,

I would rather not do any tape-recorded talks. They are, so to speak, quite lifeless. I cannot talk to a machine in the same way that I can to people. A machine gives no response. It is like shining a light into a room with dull black walls – all the light gets absorbed so the room still remains dark. I can't think what I said on that tape describing the stages leading to liberation. I hope it is not too far off the beam, but I worry that it may be a case of the blind leading the blind.

You say that “you work away at propagating the Dhamma but you doubt that anyone tries to actually practise it.” This is quite true! Very few people are truly interested in Dhamma, even here in Thailand. You must not expect more than about five percent of those that show a lot of interest to actually take up the practice in earnest. Most people are still too fascinated by the toys of our materialistic age to see the terror

that the future holds; nor do they realise that clothing, food, shelter and medicines may not always be available in the shop around the corner. To the major portion of the world's population, those things are not easy to come by.

Tan Acharn seems to be quite well and his heart trouble seems to have subsided. He doesn't give us as many talks as before, and he often won't see casual visitors who drop into the Wat. His main work at present is typing up his biography of Tan Acharn Mun. He has finished writing about half of the book, which will run to nearly 300 pages. He travels to Bangkok rather more frequently than before and sometimes goes to give talks to the King and Queen of Thailand.

With regard to the notes at the back of the English translations, the main trouble of having them in a pocket at the back is that they can get lost. It may be worth having them on a thick piece of paper so that they will fold out.

I am not against a special copy of the funeral talk being Anglicised, although I feel that some words must not be translated; for example, Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, *samādhī*, *kamma*, and perhaps some others that are well-known.

With regard the book *Against All Reason*, I have too many unread books around me at present, so it's best not to send it. I wonder what Ian meant by saying that he didn't think you should come here because of the political situation? I haven't heard of anything unusual happening on the political front, but since I don't listen to the radio and I don't read newspapers, a lot may be going on that I don't know about.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Tan Acharn used to warn us that there might come a time when food would no longer be available in the shops, apparently in order to make us practise harder so that our minds would be strong enough to withstand the privations that might lie ahead in an uncertain world.

On that note, a South African caregiver told me that by the end of the civil war in Mozambique the people were so starved for food that soon there were no wild animals left in the country because people had eaten everything; the game, the birds, even the ants.

I was encouraged to go again to Thailand by Dr. Saddhātissa of the Chiswick Vihāra, who stayed at my house after giving a talk to the Hampshire Buddhist Society. Standing on the Winchester railway station platform, waiting for his train back to London, he said, “What you are doing is very important. It is right that you should go to Thailand,” or words to that effect. Dr. Saddhātissa was a genuine Buddhist nobleman. I have a photo of him allowing the Queen of England to shake his hand as they smiled at each other like old friends!

Wat Pa Baan Taad

12th July, 1970

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn says thank you for your letter and the photo of your sister Griselda. He laughed when he saw your sister carrying her child in a sling on her back.

How odd that the Buddhist Society won't give away the books we printed of Tan Acharn's *desanā* free of charge. Don't they have any faith in *kamma*? But, as you say, Pat will probably help in this matter, so there is no need for the rest to know much about it.

I was very glad to hear that you had given up being secretary of the Hampshire Buddhist Society. I thought right from the beginning that it would interfere with your practice. Nonetheless, now that the Hampshire Buddhist Society is established it will probably turn out to be beneficial. But I would suggest that to start a subsidiary group would only become a further drag on your practice. From that experience, you can probably appreciate why I don't want to teach yet. Once one's *citta*

is really unshakeable, it doesn't matter; until then it is inadvisable, as the histories of many would-be teachers in England over the last 10 or 20 years have demonstrated.

I cannot make any comment on the bhikkhu that you mention or his doings because it is against the rules for me to talk to lay people about the serious faults of a bhikkhu. Without specific reference to any individual, I can say that upholding the Vinaya is very important for maintenance of the integrity of the Saṅgha; for without strict discipline both members of the Saṅgha and members of the lay community are liable to lose faith. In addition, when a bhikkhu breaks a major rule, it must be dealt with by the proper authorities and put right. It should not just be ignored, nor become a subject for gossip.

Your question: “Does Tan Acharn teach that until man is enlightened he has a soul or essence which goes on from birth to birth?” No, Tan Acharn does not teach that. What he does teach is that all *dhammas* are *anattā*. They always were and always will be. But the undeveloped person is so immersed in views of self and its rigid attitudes – soul, me and mine, etc. – that it is unlikely for him to think in any other way until the development of his mind allows him to see the wrongness of all his previous thinking. That which disappears upon enlightenment is

not soul or essence but *avijjā* – one’s fundamental delusion about self-identity. *Avijjā* is the central core of all our problems, for while *avijjā* is present we are unable to understand anything properly.

We are a bit concerned about possible future developments on the Thai political scene. The Thais are getting increasingly anti-Westerners; and I fear the Chinese have designs in this direction. I only hope events do not move too fast.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad
16th December, 1970

Dear Jane,

Thanks for sending your various letters and also for the booklet on abortion and other literature. One important thing to realise about abortion is that the foetus, and what happens to it, is the result of its *kamma*. You should keep in mind that the general teaching of Buddhism is that the result of killing other beings is that you will have a short life (or lives) in the future, if not worse. One naturally feels sorry for the fate of the helpless foetus, but perhaps our chief concern should be for those doctors who perform the abortions. What will their future be?

As to my being against birth control: no, I wouldn't agree here unless I really felt that it is possible to teach the majority of people to use restraint – and what hope is there of that? Even if the *gandhabba* (as the womb is called), that is ready for conception, is frustrated by birth control methods, I can see nothing morally wrong with that. Otherwise, we may be stuck with the old Brahmanical doctrine that everyone should get married and have children, that being the highest form of

practice. That doctrine was specifically contradicted by the Buddha. Even in instances where intercourse is engaged in merely for pleasure, I don't think that the karmic consequences would be much different whether birth control was used or not. Such practices are acceptable within the scope of the Five Precepts, provided that both parties are of age, consenting, married, etc. The exception here is using a contraceptive to abort a foetus after the moment of conception (essentially killing it), for it is said that consciousness is present in the embryo from that moment on. All of that notwithstanding, it is good to keep in mind that the Buddha referred to sexual intercourse as a "low practice indulged in by village folk and those unskilled in the good Dhamma."

In answer to your other question: It is impossible to say which is worse, to kill a 'breathing' human being or to kill a foetus because it depends entirely on the circumstances and on the attitude of the people concerned. In fact, the only way one could judge would be by questioning whether the results of the *kamma* of the one were worse than that of the other. It is hopeless to generalise about such matters.

I was quite glad to hear that the Catholics have come in to deal with the abortion business. They are far better organised to deal with it in the United Kingdom than anyone else. We should tend to focus our resources

more on the Dhamma rather than scatter them for the sake of good causes, worthy as they may be.

In one of your letters you asked the question: “Is it considered gambling to put cash into Premium Bonds?” Generally speaking, that is not gambling. In fact, it is more like lending money so that the gain one makes on it will counteract inflation, thereby effectively maintaining one’s capital. So for all practical purposes you may consider that what you do with stocks, shares, etc. will not be gambling.

I have seen the book *Concept and Reality*. Yes, it is good. We are trying to get a copy as the one I read belongs to Tan Jutindharo. *Saṅkhāra khandha* is not quite the same as *papañca*. *Saṅkhāra* is much more general and covers both *vitakka* and *papañca*. I think one may say that *papañca* always involves *kilesas*, but not so *saṅkhāra*. The Buddha and Sāvakas used their *saṅkhāra khandha*, but not *papañca*.

Hope you are all well.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

January 1971

Dear Jane,

With regard to Professor Smith of MIT making a film of Wat Pa Baan Taad: I'm afraid Tan Acharn would never hear of it. It is too close to advertising and he has always said that anyone who wants to, can come and see Wat Pa Baan Taad for themselves.

A lot of corrections were made in the last talk I translated, but I must admit that mostly a great improvement has been made. But I don't agree with the comment that says 'causes cannot be done.' Logically and practically, causes most certainly can be done! Correcting this talk will probably involve you in transferring the corrections to your copy. I hope that doesn't take too much time.

It is odd how some bhikkhus who go to England seem to think that the Vinaya does not matter. They really are hopeless and a very bad teaching example to the English people. After all, if they behave like lay

people, why bother about robes and ordination? They would never dare to eat openly at a restaurant in Thailand after midday.

I would suggest that you regularly practise a period of *mettā bhāvanā* and a period of *karuṇā bhāvanā*. Develop them in your heart first and then bring your family into it. This can help to relieve any difficult situations that occur from time to time with family relations.

Hope you are all well.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

April 1971

Dear Jane,

I am returning your copy of the translation of Tan Acharn's *desanā* by airmail. I'm sorry if it looks rather messed up but I made rather a lot of corrections. I have yet to get down to cleaning up the English, but that is a minor task.

I received a letter from Irmarde recently. She asked me to give her some idea of our training. I'm not yet sure how I shall reply. It is not that easy to describe the ways of Tan Acharn's training. She also said she heard that I may be going back to England soon. It is possible, but as things are at present, it will be some time yet. Nevertheless, this year has been so hot for so long that one's thoughts naturally turn to cooler places.

It is really somehow inappropriate that bhikkhus should be visiting lay groups like yours, but as things are in England I suppose it is inevitable. People here in Thailand will drive from Bangkok to Udon Thani (as far as from London to Glasgow) to stay in the monastery for a weekend.

Obviously, it is not quite the same in England, but if I return to England, I shall be quite reluctant to do much touring for the purpose of giving Dhamma talks. People must go to the Saṅgha, not vice versa! This is quite an important principle, for it is the people who must look up to and follow the Saṅgha. When the Saṅgha goes to the people, it won't be long before the bhikkhus, in following the people, have cars, radios, TV – the lot! At the same time, a degree of flexibility must be maintained on both sides and rigid attitudes, except when keeping the monastic rules, are not good.

All for now. It looks as though we are in for a bit of a storm. I hope so, it will cool the place down.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

1st July, 1971

Dear Jane,

Sorry, I have not answered before now. I see it is about three months ago that you sent a letter to me. To answer your questions: Firstly, why does consciousness come before *nāma-rūpa* in the present life?

You must understand that in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, *viññāṇa* is always talked of as being *paṭisandhi viññāṇa*, which is the relinking consciousness to the next birth and is thus (as they say) 'free of sense doors.' *Paṭisandhi viññāṇa* is that *viññāṇa* which displays the *nimitta* that is the symbol leading one to grasp at the moment of conception. To understand this, you must forget the word 'consciousness' which almost certainly mistranslates *viññāṇa* here. My understanding of *viññāṇa* is that it is a combination of 'vi' equalling 'divided' plus 'ñāṇa' equalling 'knowing.' In other words, the one *citta* (*eka cittaṃ* equals *ekaggatā*) splits into two (subject/object) and instead of there being pure *ñāṇa* (which is unlimited) the *citta* is driven by *avijjā* plus *kamma* to discriminate and thus to become 'this' knowing 'that.'

Again by virtue of *kamma*, the ‘this’ becomes *nāma* and the ‘that’ becomes *rūpa*. But this occurs immediately, without any time interval. It is comparable to an engine pulling the cars of the whole train. The engine is the cause, but the whole lot moves together – one does not go off before the other. This is as far as my understanding goes, but I may yet have to revise my views. No need to feel ashamed of not understanding this matter. Dependent Origination is very subtle and few people understand it fully. Tan Acharn hardly ever talks of this end of the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. He just says it is too high.

Secondly, the difference between internal and external *nimittas*?

Standing at the door of your house it is fairly obvious what is outside and what is inside. *Nimittas* are like this too. Again, when you see a chair in your sitting room as opposed to feeling a pain in your stomach it’s fairly obvious which is outside and which is inside. The body is like a house and ‘outside’ means outside the body, or what appears as if it is outside the body. But, whereas we can see external objects only with our eyes and sense internal feelings through our senses, the *citta* that knows is not so limited, which means that visual *nimittas* can arise externally or internally depending on the *citta*’s orientation. Visual *nimittas* are usually experienced externally because of our habitual way

of seeing the world, but they can be internal as well. In other words, a ghost walking up the stairs is an external *nimitta*, regardless of what its cause may be. Its cause may be one's *citta*, but because it is seen externally it becomes an external *nimitta*.

Thirdly, how does one know that the 'whole world' is a not a 'mental creation of one's own making?'

Who is this 'maker?' And if there is one, who creates the mind that makes the whole world? Isn't the mind also part of the world? Keep your thinking more straightforward, practical and simple and keep it to the five *khandhas* and Four Noble Truths. Don't bother about the world and where it comes from, or who made it.

You ask whether I think that distance is a barrier to Tan Acharn being your teacher. The answer is yes, and no. It is obvious that the lack of contact, the lack of direct example, and the lack of an opportunity to ask questions directly are all barriers, but they still don't prevent him being your teacher. I quite believe that there are no insuperable barriers to his helping people and influencing them where that is desirable and proper.

I like the look of Yeshe and have hopes that the Tibetans may in time develop some genuine Buddhist centres in England; but they will need a lot of help and wise organisers. I fear that the present Tibetan aid organizations are enthusiastic and emotional but lack wisdom – and probably lack money.

Please give my regards to Brian Dyas.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

17th July, 1971

Dear Jane,

A copy of *The Need for Mindfulness and Wisdom* has arrived from Brian. He made a bit of a mess of the fold-out notes on the inside of the back cover. Obviously, he got muddled when arranging the pages in their cases and then had to correct that by leaving a gap on the second page. Brian writes that he will correct this mistake when he prints the second *desanā*. We feel generally it would be much better to have a *Dhammacakka* on the cover. The present picture is alright, but somebody seeing it and not knowing what it is, would be rather puzzled. I suggest that you test this by asking someone who knows little about the Saṅgha what they think the cover picture represents. Philip suggests that we use an eight-spoked *Dhammacakka* wheel with two deer (one on either side) and underneath: *Buddham, Dhammam, Saṅgham Saraṇam Gacchāmi*. I think a suitable picture could be found in one of the art books of India. We'll continue to learn by experience, so hopefully we'll have most of the snags sorted out by the third or fourth booklet.

With regard to the young member of your group who wants to become a bhikkhu, the best action he can take is to write (probably with a note from yourself on Hampshire Buddhist Society notepaper) to Tan Jutindharo at Wat Bovornives (address: Phra Sumeru Road, Banglampoo, Bangkok) saying that he wishes to travel to Thailand to ordain at Wat Bovornives and would Tan Jutindharo please contact the abbot, Tan Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhaṇa, for his advice. The young man must understand that he will be expected to take novice ordination to become a sāmaṇera at Wat Bovornives and he will be required to do a preliminary course of study. Then, all being well, after about three to four months, he would be eligible for ordination as a bhikkhu. As to him coming to Wat Pa Baan Taad, Tan Acharn is not readily accepting new students and generally is only accepting those who show they mean business by sticking it out at Wat Bovornives for a year or more. On the other hand, if he learns Thai as well, his choice of a teacher would not be limited to Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa as there are many other excellent teachers he could learn under living in monasteries where no English is spoken. If possible, I would also suggest that he obtain a note from the London Buddhist Society saying that he is a genuine Buddhist. I don't know if it is really necessary, but the Thais are becoming more 'reference-minded' and such a note might well be very useful.

Tan Acharn's book on the life of Tan Acharn Mun has been printed and one day I should like to translate it into English. But it is 400 pages long, so I shall not start just yet. The book has caused widespread interest in Thailand; so far 5,000 copies have been printed, and someone is now printing 1,500 more.

I have managed to lay my hands on a book of ancient Thai and Lao meditation practices. It is a fascinating collection of writings on meditation by teachers of old, which will be very valuable to us in the West if I ever find time to translate some of them.

Quite a lot of rain this *pansa* (*vassa*), making the weather damp and rather heavy.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

The young friend I was helping to go to Thailand was Steven Towler. He got there and did ordain at Wat Bovornives, but by the time he reached Wat Pa Baan Taad, Tan Acharn was not taking any more Western disciples. Luckily he was able to go to Tan Acharn The's monastery as he had learned to speak Thai remarkably quickly.

I met Steven staying at Tan Acharn Fun's *wat* during a celebration of Tan Acharn Mun's life. Unfortunately, he had to disrobe later on due to health problems.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

August 1971

Dear Jane,

My main reason for writing so soon after my last letter is that I have heard from Tan Jutindharo saying that Chao Khun Sāsana Sobhaṇa would not sponsor the young man from your group who wants to come out here. In effect, this means that the only way for him to come is on a tourist visa, which requires no formal letter at all. The Thai Embassy in London will almost certainly issue him a tourist visa within 24 hours. A tourist visa is not as convenient as a non-immigrant visa; but, on the other hand, the Thai Embassy is loath to issue any other type of visa than tourist. They cannot slip up on a tourist visa! That is how nearly everyone seeking for ordination has reached Wat Bovornives in the past. The usual procedure is that the Thai authorities issue permission to stay for two weeks, after which one goes across the border to Vientiane, Laos (or Penang, Malaysia) and obtains another entry permit. Once one has become a sāmaṇera or a bhikkhu, one is usually allowed to stay in the country for an extended period.

Tan Chao Khun said that if the fellow turns up, he would probably have no objection to receiving him for the usual training period. Tan Jutindharo tells me that they have had applications from five candidates who want to study and ordain at Wat Bovornives: three from the United States, two from the United Kingdom.

I was interested to hear from you about the woman in Lusaka who is dying of cancer. Of course, her wish to be reborn into a good Buddhist family, if it comes from the heart, can be a very strong condition for the future. But probably the most important thing for her to do is to contemplate the nature of the body, seeing that ‘this body is not me,’ ‘I am not this body,’ ‘this body does not belong to me’ and ‘this body is part of the earth – it comes from it, feeds off it and finally returns to it.’

Hope you are all well.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

23rd September, 1971

Dear Jane,

Yes, I find the book on Tan Acharn Mun's life very interesting, though I haven't read very far yet as I keep looking up the meanings of words I don't know. As to my book on old Thai/Laos meditation systems, there is a fantastic amount in it, about 500 pages, giving teachings from Vientiane, Lopburi, old Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok. A lot of it is rather cryptic, so I hope to find some explanatory literature one day.

Thanks for the news on Ben. I hope married life will suit him. Obviously becoming a monk is not for everyone. As to Richard, he is emotionally a Christian and intellectually a Buddhist, and he is trying to fit the two together like a Chinese puzzle. If he does not give up one and go wholeheartedly to the other, he will not develop in either, but just tie himself in knots. Frankly, he knows too much from books that he has become unteachable. Richard is really a very nice fellow, but I don't envy the Fathers in their task of trying to 'develop' him! As to one of the Fathers saying that Buddhism and Christianity are "all the same

anyway,” I’m afraid he doesn’t know much about Buddhism or else he wouldn’t have said that.

Concerning your cause to stop abortions: your idea of an advisory service for those who are contemplating an abortion is excellent provided you can get the right people to run it. In any such venture you must have all the relevant information immediately available. People are usually more impressed by sound reasoning than by emotional appeals. Emotions can change overnight, whereas good reasons stand fast.

There is another cause which I feel needs serious attention in England, though I am not suggesting you do a lot about it, except perhaps adding some encouragement to the cause. I am referring the present gambling laws in the UK which have introduced American-style protection rackets into the country. This is a disease which has already gone too far in England, one which could seriously undermine the country’s moral standards. There are sure to be societies opposing these laws and it may be worthwhile backing them and inducing others to as well.

It looks as if the rains have stopped very early this year and there has not been nearly enough rainfall, except near the Mekong River where they had substantial flooding.

So far I have no new translations that are near completion except a short one that Ven. Dhammaramo did, but it needs quite a bit of cleaning up first. There are, however, two more which are roughly translated but need a lot of work done to get them corrected for printing. They will probably be ready sometime next year.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Not anything to add to this except a footnote to the news that Ben, Freda's son, got married at that time. His first wife, Indira, was Indian and they had two sons. The eldest, Shiva, became a Tibetan Buddhist monk at Samye Ling with the name of Lama Thubten. Ben now lives in Italy with his Burmese wife, Kontissa, who is an expert in Tai Chi.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

15th November, 1971

Dear Jane,

Here is the corrected and completed manuscript of Tan Acharn's *desanā*. I hope all my corrections are quite clear. The reference I made to the Hampshire Buddhist Society you may leave in or cross out as you see fit. I have mentioned Brian Dyas in the Introduction. If he would prefer it to be omitted, he is free to do so.

Perhaps your present way of cutting practice to two sessions – morning and evening – will work better. But you should make an effort to be mindful as much as you can throughout the day and use your wisdom in ordinary life. These two, even without sitting practice, can lead to *samādhi*.

I am not sure what the position is with Tan Philip's permission to stay in Thailand. He received a notice informing him he had to leave the country within 48 hours. But the local police chief said that 48 hours just means 'soon.' When Khun Ying Sermsri was phoned, she said: "Don't move!" and

headed off to see somebody. She is having quite a lot of trouble over this issue but she does not seem to mind unduly.

Thanks for the photos. Ian looks very well and it is the first time I have seen a picture of Brian Dyas.

Yours,

Panna

Wat Pa Baan Taad

15th December, 1971

Dear Jane,

I hope you and Ian and the family have a happy new year.

I was interested in your remarks about the Mahāyāna and their lack of ‘weed pulling.’ In this world everything is upside down and back-to-front, so it is not really surprising that Mahāyāna, which is full of esoteric books and flowery sentiment, is in general and in practice rather mundane – whereas the ‘dead, dry Theravāda’ is full of subtle and secret ways that nobody talks about. As to Mahāyāna and Theravāda coming together, it seems rather unnecessary to me because their fundamental way is that of the Saṅgha, with support from the lay community, whereas distinctions of Mahāyāna and Theravāda are just views and opinions (and conceits) that people have. In other words, I reckon the whole thing is a red herring!

You say that you enjoyed your “break from all Buddhist activities.” I assume that this refers to the various societies that you are a party to.

There is nothing wrong in taking a break as organized activities can be very tiresome. As long as you keep up the activities of mindfulness practice, other things don't matter much.

I received 20 copies of *The Funeral Desanā* a short while ago and I have now checked it through thoroughly. I am a bit uncertain how people will like some of Tan Acharn's Dhamma talks. *The Funeral Desanā* is easy to comprehend, but the other ones I translated are too 'high' for all but a few people in England. I'm afraid that most will not be able to understand them. The Buddha said that the time will come when people are so attracted by the beautiful poetry and prose of later Buddhist works that they will not be interested in pondering the depth of meaning in the Suttas. Although it may turn out a bit this way with Tan Acharn's Dhamma talks, after reflection I still reckon it is worth having them printed, at least in limited editions.

By the way, if you alter any of the wording in my translations, please send me a list of your alterations before it goes for printing so that I can check that it has not altered the original meaning. This is necessary because the meaning is not always obvious at first reading, so apparently clumsy English can be necessary to avoid distorting the meaning. I know my English is not always so good and I am quite glad

to have people check the manuscripts and un-split a few infinitives. But there are also passages that I have spent a long time trying to make more readable only to find that every change in wording introduces a change of meaning. Those passages I've had to leave for the careful reader to sort out.

An astrologer has predicted that Tan Acharn will go to England with one other monk when he is 60 – in about three years. Astrologers are notoriously inaccurate, but this one has predicted correctly in a few cases, so we shall see.

We are presently building a new hut which rumour has it I shall move into when it's completed, though Tan Acharn has yet to say anything. But it is situated at one of the best locations in the Wat because a screen of bamboos about 20 yards thick separates it from the rest of the Wat so that all one can see from there is forest.

At present we have two English monks and two American monks, but we are due for one more American to come in January – a very nice fellow with, I suspect, some very good *kamma*.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

It is a brilliant concept this co-dependence that occurs in what Acharn Paññā calls the fundamental way of the Saṅgha and its lay followers. The members of the Saṅgha Community, the monks, own nothing but their bowls and robes, while the protection of their 227 rules of conduct act like monastery walls. Moved by the monks' compassion and respect, the lay people provide them with food and shelter. When the monks are good practitioners, this will increase the lay people's happiness and enable them to make good *kamma*. It is a very simple arrangement with far reaching consequences, as evidenced by the system lasting for 2,500 years.

I can see that Acharn Paññā was right when he said that very few people would respond positively to Tan Acharn's Dhamma talks. At first I was astonished at the lukewarm reaction I received from Buddhists to whom I gave the talks. But then it had been the same when I tried to introduce them to the Suttas.

Wisdom Develops Samādhi was such a revelation to me. At last, here was someone who seemed to be giving me the teaching I had been searching for in other faiths and philosophies. What he said went right to my heart for he seemed

to understand that what I really wanted was to be a better person and for that to happen I had to deal with the *kilesas* which had been in charge for aeons. Also, as Ven. Maṅgalo said in his book on mindfulness, I was tired of reading the menu, it was time to eat the meal. Or as Tan Acharn said, it was time to stop playing about in the branches and move to the trunk of the tree. It was not enough to merely develop a peaceful mind, we must also develop wisdom and use it to dig out and destroy the fundamental ignorance that is the cause of all our troubles. The *jhānas* could take one to heaven, but sooner or later their power would wane and one would come back to earth with a thud.

Tan Acharn came to England in 1974, so the astrologer was right about that though wrong about the number of monks who accompanied him. There were two, Acharn Paññā and Acharn Cherry. I believe Acharn Cherry's mother paid their fares as a way of making merit on her birthday.

The new American arrival at Wat Pa Baan Taad was Mack Macdonald. I never met him and I don't know how long he stayed. When he left he gave a considerable amount of money towards spreading Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa's teaching in the West. It became known as the Ārāma Fund. Acharn Paññā put a supporter who lived in Devon, Geoffrey Beardsley, in charge. The funds seemed to have been

used mainly to buy land for Forest Dhamma monasteries in England. The first was Chithurst, then came the Devon Vihāra and finally the remainder was handed over to the English Saṅgha Trust. This turned out to be auspicious because Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa's books were thus made available to a far larger readership. Mack Macdonald went off to Kathmandu to become a Tibetan monk.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

5th February, 1972

Dear Jane,

I have been hard at work for about a month building a new hut. As I designed it, I had to be there to see that the work was in good order. Because of that, I've had virtually no spare time lately. Anyway it's done now – except for the finishing touches which can wait a while.

Tan Acharn said to thank you very much for the money that members of the Hampshire Buddhist Society sent for the Wat. And thank you very much for sending the pullover, which arrived in time to ward off the cold weather. Also, thanks for sending a copy of *Concept and Reality*. It is a valuable account of *papañca*. I hope the Singhalese manage to turn out some more works of this quality. They would be valuable as a foundation for understanding the teachings in the *Ti-piṭaka*.

I'm afraid it is not much use sending discourses on Buddhist meditation to writers who know nothing about Buddha-Dhamma. They will invariably get the wrong meaning and gain a distorted view of what one

has written. I suspect that 'X' is one of those fellows who likes thinking and writing, but dislikes the hard discipline required to attain true depth of experience. But that attitude is not uncommon in the world, and he is probably less opinionated than a lot of people who write about religion. I don't see much point in countering criticisms about the use of the word 'heart' for the *citta*, but you know the situation better than I do so if you think it would be of any value then do so by all means. Incidentally, my *Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives seven subheadings to the word 'heart' – only one of which refers entirely to the physical heart!

Please give my regards to Pat Wilkinson when you next see her. It is a pity that she had such bad stomach trouble. I suppose this is the result of *kamma* somewhere in her past. As to *Wisdom Develops Samādhi*, although we may be able to find enough cash to reprint it, the text really needs checking through again and, at least, needs to be put into better English.

It was very kind of Ven. Vajirañāṇa to invite us to the Singhalese Vihāra. I shall certainly keep his offer in mind, although I doubt whether we will take up his offer for a while yet.

You probably heard that the Queen and Prince Philip are in Thailand. The last I heard was that Prince Philip wanted to meet some monks

and hopefully speak with them. Apparently he will be going to Wat Bovornives on the 11th of February. It is just possible that I may be down in Bangkok for his visit, although I have no special desire to meet him unless he wants to ask about Dhamma.

Hope you had a good holiday in Trinidad.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Pat Wilkinson was at that time the secretary at the Buddhist Society. She was a *mae chee* at Wat Pa Baan Taad when Freda and I went in 1965. She was invaluable in teaching us Thai etiquette, of which we knew nothing. We learnt how to sit with our legs to one side with the ankles crossed when in public; how put to our palms together when addressing senior monks; how to wait until a monk put out his receiving cloth before offering anything. We were even taught how to hang out our washing!

Acharn Paññā did meet Prince Philip; there is an excellent photo of the occasion. Acharn Jutindharo and Acharn Khantipālo were also present. Acharn Paññā said that Prince Philip asked some very good questions. It's a pity the Royals are so addicted to blood sports. I just hope that all they do for wildlife and young people will stand them in good stead when their time comes to move on to a new life.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

15th June, 1972

Dear Jane,

I have been away in Bangkok for about a month. I had to go to the hospital for a minor operation on my tubercular foot. The doctors took X-rays and saw something suspicious there, so they operated using a local anaesthetic. Eventually they found some chronic inflammation but no sign of tuberculosis.

With regard to your practice: that “subtle, strong state” is obviously right, but I am unsure about the “fainting” state you mentioned. It sounds as though the *citta* is escaping due to lack of mindfulness, but can you say any more about it? What result do you get? Do you feel fresh and clear afterwards? I will ask Tan Acharn about this some time.

I mentioned to Tan Acharn that you would like to come here again towards the end of this year. He made no comment, though this is not very significant because it is still too far ahead and too indefinite for him to say too much. One thing, however, our rains retreat ends on 22nd October. If Tan Acharn has no objection, the first two or three weeks of October would be the best time for your visit. Tan Acharn is almost

certain to be here and there would be no ceremonies or visitors. It is still likely to be quite hot though.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

30th August, 1972

Dear Jane,

I expect you have heard from Ian about your proposed trip to Thailand, but just in case he did not receive the letter I sent: Tan Acharn says that you can come any time from the middle of September up to October 20th. The rains retreat ends on October 22nd, at which time the monastery will be full up with guests until our Kaṭhina ceremony on October 28th. After that Tan Acharn is likely to travel at times, making it rather difficult to be sure when he'll be here.

Ian was rather concerned about the possibility of danger here but, as I told him, the main danger in Thailand is on the roads so it is best to avoid travelling by bus. I would also reckon that there is more danger in Bangkok than here. General lawlessness is on the increase in Thailand, but it is mainly centred in the cities. So long as you are careful of where you go and how you travel, you need not be concerned.

Thank you for letting me know of Jhānananda's death. She certainly lived a very colourful life and she met many Buddhist teachers along

the way. I think maybe she gained more on her own in her old age.
Strange *kamma*!

Have you read *Worlds in Collision* by Velikovsky? I read it when I was in Bangkok. He reconstructs from ancient sources the cataclysmic events that took place on the planet during the period 2,800 to 3,400 years ago. From a careful reading of the Old Testament he reasons that a series of worldwide disasters occurred due to the near approach a comet made to the earth. It is a fantastic story and, although not directly connected with Dhamma, it can give an insight into other religions and can shake up whatever security one feels there might be on this earth.

How is the latest booklet going now? I am doubtful whether it is worth the cost of printing at present. As for any future booklets, I think plenty of places exist where you could get them typed out on metal-litho and have two or three hundred run off for about a quarter the cost of printing. That is all we need at present. Perhaps the time will come when a full-scale printing of one or two thousand copies will be worthwhile – but not yet.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

19th September, 1972

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. I had to look up the word 'voile' in my dictionary. It says: "a thin semi-transparent cotton, woollen or silken dress material." It would be nice to get enough cotton voile to make a *saṅghāti* (outer robe) for Tan Acharn. The voile would be used only for the outer robe (but not for the *cīvara* or the *sabong*) because that robe must be made with a double thickness and a heavier cloth is very hot. Voile is particularly valuable because it is difficult to get such thin cotton in Thailand.

The cotton bolts that we use are a standard width of 1 yard (or 1 metre) and a *saṅghāti* requires about 16 yards of material. The cloth should preferably be white, although a light yellow would also be alright if white is not available. After cutting and sewing the cloth into robes, we wash the robes in jackfruit juice (or rather boiled up shavings from the jackfruit trees) and then dye them to get the colour right.

At present, it would be nice to have one bolt of the voile for Tan Acharn's *saṅghāti*. We will probably have suitable cloth for the other two robes, but would you bring out a small sample of another similar cloth so that we can see what it is like. I'm afraid that I am not very skilled in the 'rag trade.'

Thanks for the offer of books from the Pāli Text Society, but we have all we need for the moment and I have their Pāli/English dictionary already. I feel we already have too many books here, which makes me slightly concerned that when the time comes to leave we may have too much stuff to send back to the United Kingdom.

The typhoon we had was not much more than moderately high winds with a lot of rain. Its strength was broken by the hills and forest between here and Vietnam. We have had another one since and it hardly came to anything by the time it reached us. The weather has been unusually dry this year – far too little rain over most of the country, meaning the harvest will probably be poor. Udon Thani has been fairly fortunate in this regard and will most likely enjoy a moderate crop.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

These letters are all to do with my plan to go to Thailand again. I had been asked to bring out some light-weight material to be made up into an outer robe for Tan Acharn. It was a donation that would never have occurred to me on my own – and I felt it to be a great honour.

*Jane's Third Visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad
October to November 1972*

The fact that I received only one letter from Acharn Paññā during my stay shows that this was a relatively peaceful time for me. I was made to feel welcome and accepted.

The plan was that I would meet my Thai friend, Fergnsin Trafford, in Bangkok and we would travel up to the Wat together. I had first met her when she came to one of my slightly disastrous talks on the Buddha-Dhamma for Humanist group in Southampton. Her Roman Catholic husband was a Customs Officer and they had met at university. Her brother was a doctor in London. After that she began attending the Hampshire Buddhist Society meetings, and it was great to have a genuine natural-born Buddhist amongst us.

Eventually she and her husband moved to Birmingham. But we did keep in touch as they would spend their summer holidays in our flat in Cornwall. It was through her that I was able to write letters in Thai directly to Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa. Later she became well known for her interfaith work. Her son Paul is writing

her biography, *Thursday's Lotus*, which makes fascinating reading. One of my favourite photographs is of Khun Ying Sermsri, Fergnsin and I giving *dāna* to Tan Acharn as he returned from his early morning *piṇḍapāta*. Fergnsin was one of the very few people who was not at all intimidated by Tan Acharn so she chatted away to him quite naturally.

The flight out for that trip was rather exciting because for some reason we landed in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It was at the time of the Communist takeover and the plane was repainted in the colours of Air Cambodia. We were surrounded by soldiers with guns while this was going on. I was on the cheapest flight I could find since I was paying the fare myself.

The plane finally arrived in Bangkok three hours late, but the good sisters Khun Ying Sermsri and Songsri were there to meet me and kindly drove me to the YWCA where Robert Exell was waiting with my Wat clothes and other paraphernalia, which he had stored for me so that I didn't have to take them back and forth to England.

The next morning someone collected me by taxi at 4:30 a.m. We had a hair-raising drive to the train station as the road we were on suddenly changed from being

one-way to two-way and we found ourselves hurtling along on the wrong side straight into the oncoming traffic! I shut my eyes and prayed to Tan Acharn, and somehow we survived. It really seemed like a miracle.

There had been a huge tropical thunderstorm during the night and it was a lovely cool day. Khun Yings Sermsri and Songsri were travelling with us and chattered away as I sat by the huge open window entranced by the beautiful countryside. The canals were full of different coloured waterlilies; buffalo were being scrubbed down by tiny little children; lines of monks were going on their early morning almsround. They stopped to collect food in their bowls from women who crouched down, waiting. When the monks approached the women rose up and reverently touch the dishes to their foreheads. It was symbolic of the generosity and reverence for the Saṅgha that is so deeply embedded in the Thai character. Going through Thonburi Province the scenery changed to wooded hills and mountains. Then to top it all off, a wonderful long sunset as we drove from Udon Thani to the Wat.

There were welcoming lamps on the steps of the *sālā* and Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa and Acharn Paññā soon appeared to greet us and walk down with us to our *kuṭis*.

Later that evening we offered our flowers and gifts. Tan Acharn chose to tell us at that time not to make difficulties between the sects. It had certainly been my aim to disregard sectarian differences between the different branches of Buddhism and to learn from them all.

Tan Acharn asked if I would be frightened being in a *kuṭi* by myself and I said no, apart from the frog I had seen in the bathroom. Tan Acharn laughed and laughed and said frogs didn't matter but snakes did.

The next morning while the monks were away on *piṇḍapata* to the village the Khun Ying sisters and I were taken on a tour of the Wat. The flourishing Bodhi Tree had a carpet of green moss under it and I collected some leaves to take home.

Tan Paññā and Tan Philip came down that afternoon for a chat. Acharn Paññā explained that one of the reasons why Tan Acharn talked about animals so much, apart from his love and compassion for them, was to illustrate that the *citta* is what mattered, not the body.

We were allowed to go up to the *sālā* that evening to watch the *Pāṭimokkha* ceremony. When the monks sat together in a tight little group as one of them recited the 227 Vinaya rules at great speed, with Tan Acharn correcting them if

they made a mistake. Before the monks listen to the *Pāṭimokkha* recitation, they kneel facing each other in pairs and confess to any offences.

Just in case I was getting too cocky, Tan Acharn said the next morning at the meal that some people wanted so much to come to the Wat, but when they got there they wanted to do something else. Hearing that made me squirm a bit because homesickness would overwhelm me at times, and I figure he must have picked that up. At the same time, he said that the *citta* could be made strong enough to cure any disease. I suppose attachment to home and family was like a disease to me.

The next day I got down to the practice in earnest. But then I had a horrible dream in which I struck out at Tan Acharn, but his stick went out to prevent my making contact. It was for me very distressing; but it was important not to make too much of a drama over it, as it was obviously the *kilesas* reacting ahead to the pressures that were about to be applied to them.

The 19th of October was Acharn Paññā's birthday; we were the same age, 47 but for a few weeks. I had a long peaceful practice and as a result had a good insight into suffering being the result of sensuous pleasures of all kinds.

On the 20th I left the Wat and took the night train to Bangkok and returned to the YWCA expecting to be leaving for England on the 26th.

On the 24th I met with Phra Khantipālo and was given a copy of *Entering the Path of Enlightenment*. He told me that Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa was in Bangkok, which I found reassuring as I had heard that my flight on the 26th had been cancelled.

I was able to change the flight to the 16th November with the help of the husband of a friend of Fergnsin's who was the chief pilot with Royal Thai International. Miraculously, I had no difficulty in renewing my visa, so I returned to Udon Thani with some relief. On the flight to Udon, some general I met while travelling gave me a bunch of flowers to offer to the Buddha.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

October 1972

Dear Jane,

I had to go down to Bangkok with Tan Acharn on Monday and I am very glad to be back today. I don't much like staying in Bangkok.

I don't know whether Tan Philip will be able to do the Kaṭhina chant tomorrow. He seems to have gastritis. As this is likely to be a non-toxic upset rather than a specific disease, it's doubtful if stomach cures will be much use. Thanks for the offer of streptotriad – I will tell him – but I think he may already have some, unless it is out-of-date.

Don't worry about the Kaṭhina ceremony – it is best to assume naïve ignorance and do nothing. If you try to do anything, someone is sure to come along and do the complete opposite, so it is best to sit back and watch.

Thanks for your letter from Bangkok. I think you should be a bit careful about fasting. Generally, when one is over 40, it is unadvisable to fast

for long periods of time. Even if you just cut down food to a small quantity, you still need to eat normal meals for about two days a week.

I expect I'll see you tomorrow.

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

Kaṭhina ceremony at Baan Taad Monastery was held on 29th October that year.

For the special occasion I decided to make some egg sandwiches with the fresh bread I had brought from town. But the hard boiled eggs wouldn't peel properly so I ended up botching the whole enterprise up. Never mind, the dogs and the squirrels had a feast that day. In the end, a kindly laywoman and a nun let me share in their offerings. All in all, it was a very happy occasion

As always things quickly quieted down and I was back to the practice, which was not easy after such a hectic week.

The following day was a struggle. I had a fierce headache all day. After dark there was a bitch in heat nearby which the dogs were fighting over all night. Two huge spiders were standing by my walking meditation candles, making the turns an alarming process!

I awoke at 4:45 a.m. and tried to make soup on my charcoal burner. It looked like pig swill but tasted quite good. Many visits later I was taught by Dr. Amara (I was sharing a *kuṭi* with her while she was caring for Tan Acharn's mother at the end of

her life) that you must never taste food you are preparing for bhikkhus. She said you must leave the results of your cooking to the Dhamma.

I was attempting to fast which seemed to make me feel very weak and unable to arouse wisdom. Visits from Acharn Paññā and Tan Philip were always helpful and reassuring as Tan Philip was also struggling. It was a continuous struggle to figure out how to deal with the pain that arose from sitting for long periods, using different methods for investigating the cause. Sloth and torpor was cured by going outside and walking up and down my meditation path very fast to restore my energy levels. But the practice was like a boxing match that seemed to go on and on with new types of attack to contend with at every turn. Māra never gave up. I used to stagger up to the *sālā* in the mornings and sit watching the monks returning from *piṇḍapāta* and distributing the food. After the blessing I returned to my *kuṭi* always feeling refreshed.

Meanwhile, life in the women's area carried on at its own pace. Apart from me, there were seldom any visiting laywomen staying there. Village men and women would come and do odd jobs about the place. The three or four resident nuns would be up as early as three a.m. preparing food to supplement the meagre offerings that came from the village almsround.

In spite of my struggles in my meditation practice, I experienced some very happy and peaceful times.

On the 4th November Tan Cherry sent me some nice photos of the Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa to take back to England. On the same day Dr. Ouay and a party mostly of medical people arrived. In the *sālā* that morning Tan Acharn accused me of thinking of England not of Dhamma – he could be very fierce at times. That night a huge wind, which seemed to come out of nowhere, swept through the Wat bringing branches crashing down onto the tin roofs and making an awful noise. The next day a lot of sweeping went on to clear the paths of the fallen debris.

Khun No, Khun Mae's nun friend gave me a lovely new fly whisk with a soft head like a mare's tail which she must have made from shredding a certain type of bamboo. I took it back to England where it proved very handy for keeping the flies away from the pony's eyes when I was riding in the summer.

On the morning of the 7th November there was the most enormous explosion in the distance. It sounded like an ammunition store blowing up. No one paid the slightest attention. Because my mind was becoming calmer, I noticed how the least thought would cause it to vibrate. It all seemed so impossibly difficult

to deal with that I would despair. But then something, like the sky being full of swallows swooping and chattering excitedly, would lift my spirits.

On the 8th November I said a formal goodbye to Tan Acharn as I didn't think I would see him again. He said that I must do as much practice as possible commensurate with my duties and that I should help Ian in a dispassionate way. He told me not to bring gifts the next time I came out as he was concerned only with the progress of my mind since I was his disciple. After the blessing he told me to be happy, to relax and to take it easy as there was nothing to worry about. Before I departed, Anon offered to pay my fare next time I came out.

On the 9th November we set off in a minivan for Acharn Fun's monastery, picking up Tan Acharn's sister, Khun Chan Dee, in the village on the way. Khun Ying Sermisri was already staying there and she showed me around the monastery. As we walked past Acharn Fun's *kuṭi*, he called out to her, asking who I was. Upon being told, he said, "She should be doing meditation!" Apparently he said that to everyone.

It was a lovely surprise to meet Tan Steven and Tan Don there. Tan Steven later disrobed and now lives in Australia. A few years ago he was asked to translate

some of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa's later *desanās*. Those translations are now available in book form, under the title *Sandiṭṭhiko Dhamma*.

The next day, 11th November (my 47th birthday) a Kaṭhina ceremony was held at Wat Pa Sarawan. Since Acharn Mun died on 11th November 1949, all his remaining close disciples were in attendance and Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa gave the Dhamma talk. Just as he began to speak, a lorry started revving up outside the hall, drowning out his voice. I decided to try out the strength of my *citta*, so I mentally rose from my seat, moved across the hall, went down the steps, walked over to the lorry and pulled out the ignition key. Miraculously it worked, and I mentally returned to my seat. This was the first and the last time I have tried to use psychic powers. In the event, most likely it was sheer coincidence.

After the ceremony was over, we visited a *chedi* which was said to contain some of Acharn Mun's relics. Khun Ying Sermsri said that I should wish for something important to me. I made two wishes that day and both of them were eventually answered in rather unexpected ways.

That afternoon we drove back to Udon to catch the night train to Bangkok. I had been fasting for 48 hours and decided to join Khun Ying Sermsri for a meal in

the evening, feeling very guilty as I was still observing the Eight Precepts. In the middle of the meal there was a commotion and we were told that Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa was waiting outside the restaurant to see us!

Well, that's what a teacher is for: to stomp on any sign of hubris. It was so embarrassing it was funny. He was smiling broadly at my discomfort, and I just shook my head in disbelief as I crouched on the pavement beside the car. Nevertheless, I slept like a log on the train. I doubt I would have if I hadn't eaten.

The next day Khun Ying Sermsri came and had breakfast with me at the YWCA and in the afternoon took me to see a model of the ancient city of Ayutthaya, which was the original capital of Thailand, built in the 1300s and repeatedly attacked by the Burmese until it was finally destroyed by them in 1767.

We also visited Tan Acharn Lee in his rather dilapidated monastery. He spoke to us about the reasonableness of the Dhamma, a lovely description. It would make a good title for a book on Dhamma.

The following day Tan Cherry's mother arrived in Bangkok and together we visited Jim Thomson's beautiful house, he was responsible for making Thai silk famous all over the world. She gave me lunch at a very grand hotel. The peace I

had attained from the austere simple life at the Wat was beginning to fade away. I just hoped it would return once I got home to country life in England.

Before leaving I went to pay my respects to Mae Chee Kaew, who was staying with Dr. Charoen and his wife, and offered her mangoes and tangerines. For once, she was very kind and friendly. She told the Charoens I had done some good work, which was encouraging. I also managed a wonderful three-hour practice in their shrine room, no doubt influenced by her presence.

I travelled back to England in great comfort on one of Pan Am's new, enormous jumbo jets. My heart was bursting with gratitude for all the kindness that the Thai people had shown me while I was in their care.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1972

Dear Jane,

In connection with the *citta*, I can only explain it as I understand it from listening to Tan Acharn's teachings.

Firstly, you must not try to understand the nature of the *citta* from the viewpoint of the *khandhas*. The *citta* is the essential and 'real' one, the one that does not die and, existing beyond *samsāra*, it cannot be understood from the viewpoint of *samsāra*. Therefore, we cannot say that it 'is' or that it 'is not.' Nor can we say where it is, or at what time it exists, because all such categories belong to *samsāra*. Nor can we say that the *citta* goes from life to life, because that is a *samsāric* viewpoint which sees 'life' as being of ultimate importance. In fact, the *citta*, which has no goings or comings, is the truly important one – not this life or that life.

Unfortunately, the *citta* is permeated with the fundamental delusion of *avijjā*. And even though *avijjā* is no more real than anything else in

saṃsāra, it effectively prevents the *citta* from knowing its own true nature. Because its true nature has been blinded by the power of delusion, the *citta* turns its attention outward in search of that which is real, true, beautiful, etc. In other words, misguided by delusion, the *citta* searches for its own essential nature in external things. Thus, in consequence of *avijjā* expressing itself in the mode of *taṇhā*, the *citta* grasps and clings to a bodily form to represent the true ‘image’ of itself. The *citta* then animates and controls that body through the functions of *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. But those outward manifestations are always unsatisfactory, because taken together they are merely an imperfect substitute for the *citta* itself. Such modifications of the *citta* are always *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*; whereas the *citta* is the opposite, that is, *nicca*, *sukha*, *attā* (*attā* being the opposite of *anattā*, but not meaning a ‘self’).

With regard to the modifications of the *citta*: the *citta* is ‘real’ and *saṃsāra* is ‘unreal.’ All of *saṃsāra* is *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*; and so, from the viewpoint of the *citta*, the changing nature of *saṃsāra* appears phantom-like, while its own true nature never alters. Therefore, although it is deluded by *saṃsāra*, the *citta* is really deceiving itself because it imbues *saṃsāra* with its own delusion (that is, we see people,

animals, houses, trees and so on without realising that they are all merely *saṅkhāras*, and as such quite impersonal phenomena).

The greatest delusion of the *citta* is the deluded view that a ‘self’ or a ‘soul’ exists within the five *khandhas*. The *khandhas* are actually quite unnecessary to the *citta*. But because the *citta* does not know its true nature, it grasps the five *khandhas* tightly because it is unable to comprehend what its existence would mean without them. Without the five *khandhas* to cling to, the *citta* fears that it will vanish into annihilation. But in truth, the *khandhas* are a great burden on the *citta*, because it is by means of the five *khandhas* that we constantly make the *kamma* that keeps us wandering aimlessly through *saṃsāra*. To the Arahants who are free from delusion, however, the five *khandhas* can be very useful tools for teaching others and helping the world find freedom from suffering. Without the animating principle of the *citta*, the five *khandhas* cannot operate – they simply break apart and die.

I have no knowledge of X’s view about the three *cittas*; fundamentally, there is only one. But when speaking of modifications of the *citta*, there is sometimes talk of this *citta* and that *citta*. Thus, in the Abhidhamma, they describe 89 (I think) *cittas*, such as 12 rooted in *lobha* – 4 in *dosa* and 4 in *moha*. (The figures may not be correct. I can’t remember it now).

But each of those is merely a modification of the *citta*, thus referring to them as different *cittas* is just a way of speaking.

From the viewpoint of *saṃsāra*, the *citta* is mysterious. One text I read of speaks of it having the characteristics of will, knowing and action. The action being non-*kamma*-forming in the pure *citta*.

The experiences that can arise in the *citta* are incredible. They are all *saṅkhāras* which form together like clouds, then break up and disperse. The reasons for their arising are rooted mainly in the past – but it probably needs a Buddha to understand their full extent.

And yes, trees can continue throw out new shoots until they are cut down at the roots by *paññā*. But it is a part of the daily practice to try to be mindful and use wisdom to avoid planting new seeds, and to pull up tender shoots before they grow strong.

Paññā

P.S. In fairness I must say that Tan Acharn has not said all the above. Nevertheless, I think it is fairly well based on his general teaching.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

24th January, 1973

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letters. Fasting seems to be one of those practices that Westerners must be rather cautious about. Philip experienced quite a lot of health issues when fasting. One thing he seemed to lack was Vitamin B. Dr. Udom put him on large doses of supplements, and his health has improved recently.

It is very difficult for me to say whether you should leave England and become a nun in Thailand. Quite apart from the obvious family difficulties, it is very hard to know how you will react to a long period of seclusion in the forest. I suspect that the conditions for practice in England are substantially better than those in Thailand because it is much quieter and the cold and rain tend to force one's focus inward much more. But there are no teachers, hardly any Saṅgha, few understanding lay followers and hardly anywhere to go for meditation practice. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future all of those conditions will be fulfilled. I certainly hope so.

I shall await the turn of events at Oaken Holt Buddhist Centre (near Oxford) with interest. I am slightly concerned that apart from your ‘hut’ there is nowhere suitable for us to stay if we return to the United Kingdom. Even then, your hut is suitable for only one or, at the most, two bhikkhus. Perhaps Oaken Holt will turn out to be a suitable place in this regard.

Concerning my previous comments on *attā* and *anattā*, I am including here a quotation from Chao Khun Upali Siricando, who was one of Tan Acharn Mun’s teachers (I have just been translating this passage): “No one should doubt the foregoing, saying ‘where is this *attā*?’ for did not the Lord Buddha clearly state *Sabbe dhammā anattā*? This statement we must accept as true, but only in the sense that it means *anattā* of ourselves. Should the meaning be seen as *anattā* of Dhamma, that is incorrect.”

In other words, as I understand it, the pure *citta* is *attā* and also Dhamma (or the ‘body’ of Dhamma). The teachings of the Buddha are the outward expressions of Dhamma that merely point the way to the real thing. The real thing is transcendental and cannot be known directly by any mundane means. It can be known only in one’s own heart when it is purified.

In *Sabbe dhammā anattā*, I understand *dhammā* (plural) to be the manifestations of Dhamma which can also be involved with *kilesas*; and because they are not Dhamma (singular) they must all be *anattā*.

Certainly I don't mind if John Richards has a copy of what I've said on *attā*, but only on the condition that he does not quote it in any published journal, book or elsewhere. I would like to be more certain of my ground before that happens, as it may not, at present, be wise to publish such views, however true they may be. My understanding on this matter is so far removed from the orthodox Theravada view that it may well upset some people. It is, by the way, worth reading carefully the section called *Attāvagga* (The Self) in the *Dhammapāda*.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

For a short time it seemed to me that I should have the courage of my convictions and leave home to become a nun. However, in my heart of hearts I knew that I would never do it. I was far too attached to my family, my animals and my home, and I was afraid of the hurt it would cause. After all I had made one exodus (from my first marriage); I didn't want to appear to be making a habit of it.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

6th July, 1973

Dear Jane,

Sorry I haven't written for ages but I sort of get out of the habit of writing letters these days. At present, I am visiting Bangkok for dental work and new eye glasses but I will be returning in a couple of days. Tan Acharn asked me to thank you for the stomach medicine you sent and also for the card for Vesak. I understand that Tan Cherry has informed you that Tan Acharn said okay to your coming out in September.

I was sorry to hear about your mother's illness. It is very odd the way doctors seem so intent on prolonging the life of a patient, regardless of age, disease or even how much longer they have to live. One is reminded of how insects, like ants, are bound to certain courses of action, even though circumstances may no longer favour such actions. We can only hope that this extra lease on life she's been given will be of real benefit to her in some way.

With regard to your friends coming out to Wat Pa Baan Taad: I would advise that one should be very cautious about suggesting this to other

people, particularly elderly people. It is a very big change from their present environment and could do more harm than good.

Thank you for the book by J. Monod. It is an interesting read, although micro/biochemistry is a bit outside my field of studies. Unfortunately, most scientists make poor philosophers and even worse interpreters of religion. So, although I can understand his reasoning for the most part, it seems he's made various unsupported (and unscientific) assumptions in his final conclusion.

In one of your letters you brought up the idea of starting an English branch of Wat Pa Baan Taad. I really don't know what to advise here. The whole future of the Saṅgha in England is so full of unknown factors and problems that I cannot see any clear solution. But, if you do start something, it would not be wise to copy Wat Pa Baan Taad or any other *wat*. The whole situation in England is so different that in many ways we have to find a new pattern as no copy could ever survive.

As to Ian being a sort of bursar to a Vihāra, should the situation arise, I think he may very well be suitable for such a job, if he wishes to do it. I don't know him very well, but with his background I feel he could be quite a valuable person to have in that capacity.

Now, to revisit the question of *attā/anattā*: truly speaking, no conclusive definition of *attā* is possible because, from the viewpoint of the world of *saṃsāra*, *attā* does not exist. The viewpoint of *saṃsāra* stems from sights, sounds, odours, tastes, touches and mental processes. You must also understand that this worldview includes everything we know – including speech and language. So how could you possibly define with speech and language what is not of *saṃsāra* and therefore does not exist? It is because *saṃsāra* equals existence that the Buddha taught that all *dhammas* are *anattā*.

Now, the deluded outlook that we ordinary people have is that truth and reality are what come in through our senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, etc. Our whole outlook on life is based on just that. Consequently, the ordinary person's outlook is false because he does not know the 'pure *citta*,' which is a convenient name for what is really not nameable – one can also call it *attā*. On the other hand, the person who knows Dhamma realises that all of *saṃsāra* is dreamlike and unreal. In truth, the pure *citta* is *nicca* (permanent), *sukha* (happiness) and not *anattā*. The pure *citta* is also truth, and thus Dhamma. But no matter what one calls it, if one tries pin it down with a definition, that definition will be untrue because one's name-calling and defining are

all based on *samsāric* concepts. Some prefer to call it the ‘nameless one,’ others like Rinzai call it ‘the true man of no position.’

Calling the pure *citta* ‘God,’ for instance, only adds another name to something that is totally unnameable; something that in no way equates with the word ‘God’ as it is used in all the major religions. To avoid confusion, it is perhaps better to avoid words such as God, *Attā* and even Dhamma, all of which have multiple meanings in *samsāric* usage.

Generally, I prefer ‘pure *citta*.’ I hope this helps to clear some confusion without adding any more. But, please don’t quote me on this except to such people as are liable to listen sympathetically, like Freda or John Richards.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

My mother had had a very severe stroke while staying with a friend in London. She had been to see a specialist about her painful, arthritic knees, and he had given her cortisone injections. Always loathe to spend money on her own comfort, she had returned home by Tube instead of getting a taxi as she should have done. Poor darling, although then at death's door she lived for another six years and died at the age of 82. Only during the last two years of her life did she seem to be at peace. She was not physically incapacitated, but her mental faculties and her ability to speak were severely impaired. It was so frustrating for her, because part of her brain seemed to be aware and yet her ability to speak and read had gone. It was sad because she was a very cerebral person, having trained to be an architect. I don't know if she learned anything from her time after the stroke, but we who cared for her certainly did.

*Preparations for Tan Acharn's
Visit to London*

Wat Pa Baan Taad

11th March, 1974

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosures. We are scheduled to arrive in England on 8th June and we expect to stay for a fortnight. As for accommodation, I have written to Maurice Walshe, asking him to book us into the Hampstead Vihāra at Haverstock Hill¹². I am expecting a reply from him any day now, but so far nothing is definitely fixed.

I am glad Pat asked you to do the review for my book *Forest Dhamma*. So often I think that book reviews are of doubtful value and sometimes positively harmful – at least where genuine Dhamma is concerned. An

12. In 1962 the Hampstead Buddhist Vihāra was set up at 131 Haverstock Hill. It was later sold when the Saṅgha moved to Chithurst in Sussex in 1979.

adverse criticism of genuine Dhamma can have adverse consequences for the critic as well.

I am not entirely looking forward to our trip to England. I expect there'll be a lot of difficulties and that moving about will be somewhat restricted. It's hard to adapt the Vinaya rules to life in a modern society. I don't know how it will play out when we set up the Saṅgha in England, though it's not something that concerns me at present.

Two books have recently come our way that might interest you and Ian. The first book is titled *Supernature*; the other is called *The Secret Life of Plants*¹³. Some of the things that have been discovered about plants and biology read almost like pure demonstrations of psychic phenomena. The former book stays closer to science; but the latter is more fascinating, and it says some terrible things about practically every type of food that is eaten in all developed countries.

Yours,

Paññā

13. *Supernature* by Lyall Watson; *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins & Christopher Bird.

Jane's Recollections

My sister, Griselda, managed to prolong her stay in England until the monks arrived. I was so pleased that she and her five-year-old daughter, Polly, had this chance to meet Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa and Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho and receive their blessings. Tan Acharn was very fond of children. When Polly went up to offer him something, he remarked what a lovable child she was. She still has that quality.

Living in Australia as she does, Griselda was later able to visit Wat Pa Baan Taad several times. She took offerings of honey from her bees and, being a potter, mugs and bowls that she had made herself.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
20th April, 1974

Dear Jane,

All is finally settled at Haverstock Hill and the Secretary, George Sharp, has been very helpful, which is a good omen. And I am glad that you managed to get the fortnight off to stay in London.

I didn't ask Tan Acharn about your question whether it was best to have your mum living with you or in a nursing home. It is never much good asking Tan Acharn a question like that because he knows nothing of the situation and could not answer it beyond vague generalities. Even I, who knows the environment and can see some of the problems involved, would still not like to speculate on which is right.

The answer depends so much on how your mother reacts in the nursing home as opposed to how she reacts with you. Taking purely her point of view, it is best for her to live wherever she is most calm and happy. But there is the problem of how you assess where she is most happy. We were lent a book recently called *On Death and Dying*¹⁴, an American paperback giving information on an investigation into the problems

14. *On Death and Dying*, by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (first published in 1964).

of terminally ill patients. I didn't read it but I think it may have some relevance to your mother's condition.

Thanks for the copy of your review of *Forest Dhamma*. The only comments I will make are that I feel you should be careful with terminology. For instance, Tan Acharn is strictly a Thai idiom, so it's better rendered for publication as Venerable Ācariya. Also, Wat Pa Baan Taad should be Baan Taad Forest Monastery. One easily gets used to the Thai idiom, making it easy to forget that most English readers will be quite unfamiliar with it.

I wonder if you have managed to get a house in Cornwall yet? I once stayed in Camborne for about three months many years ago – not the best part of Cornwall – but I expect you will be near Truro, which is the county town and rather nice.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

We did find a large tumbledown farmhouse with all the farm buildings intact, which I hoped might eventually be turned into a monastery if the Western monks ever returned to England. It took a year to make it habitable; meanwhile, we were living in a small terraced house overlooking the Fal estuary near Truro. Ian had got a job with the Cornwall County Council.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

12th July, 1974

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letters. Our return trip was without incident, except that we had to stay in Bangkok for a week before returning, which was generally rather unpleasant.

Thanks for all your help in England. I must say, people were very generous and helpful, and I realise now how the cost of living is constantly going up and how much things have changed since I lived there.

With regard to your coming here next year, the only times to come are between October to the end of February. This would also be good for your mother as it's heading into the Australian summer. But you should keep an eye on the Thai political situation, it is getting increasingly disturbed internally. There is not likely to be a lot of trouble up here in Udon Thani, but Bangkok is already getting very troubled. As to the notes in my letters, I have no objection to Griselda typing them out but I would rather they were not published – not yet any way.

In your letter you say you are getting neurotic about meeting people and that other people's mental states are burdensome. I can well understand this as you have a sensitive nature. And sensitivity means that your heart is open and easily subject to influence by others (and it can also influence others strongly). But sensitivity is not such a disadvantage in Dhamma because it enables you to get to know a lot of things directly and deeply, so you can see through things easily and are not fooled by appearances. So, obviously, you do not want to desensitize the mind, but you do need to learn how to protect it. Generally speaking, the factor you must develop is a firm refuge, which must be internal and must be a safe haven where you can go whenever you need it. To begin with, you can make your practice your refuge. In other words, whenever a situation causes difficulties, simply turn your attention to the practice – just watching the breath, or *buddho*.

The essential faculty is always mindfulness. As long as you are mindful you will not forget yourself and your mind will not tend to become emotionally involved with other people. This is a skill that you should try to develop; then, meeting other people can be a help to spur you on to develop a mindful awareness.

Another thing to watch for is ‘getting neurotic,’ as you call it. This comes about when excessive thinking leads to emotional states concerning something which has yet to happen, but presumably will. The fault here is ‘wrong thought’ and the cure is to learn to watch and reflect on one’s thoughts, and if they are wrong, stop them, or divert them. In some of the papers I gave you there is one on taking the refuges in *Ti-saraṇa-gamaṇa* by Chao Khun Upāli. You may find it worthwhile reading.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

In regard to publishing Acharn Paññā's letters at this time: it is a relief to see that he might have agreed to it after all. I never asked him about it when I last saw him, which is perhaps a good thing in case he had said, "On no account!"

I received very helpful advice on how to control my mind when meeting people. It is extremely difficult for me to remain mindful when I am talking to people. I am always asking for useful strategies. One monk said to keep my mind on the pressure of my feet on the floor; another said to make a rule of only saying things that were conducive to Dhamma, which is rather a tall order. Years later Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa pressed me to remember to be mindful when I was with people.

The London visit was a great success, many people came to pay their respects to Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, including Christmas Humphries, the President of the Buddhist Society, who brought a great platter of fruit which he offered to the Tan Acharn.

For me it was a joy that my mother and Ian, my husband, came and offered *dāna* and received a blessing. My mother gasped when Tan Cherry tipped his ice cream

into his bowl, pouring it all over the meat and veggies. My daughter and my four-year-old grandson John also came one afternoon. John wanted to stay but his nanny firmly led him away.

Khun Ying Sermsri did a great job of recording the talks and the question-and-answer sessions. Acharn Paññā had the challenging task of translating from the Thai as Tan Acharn was not up to giving talks in English.

A book was produced of English translations of the Dhamma talks and the question-and-answer sessions called *The Dhamma Teaching of Ācariya Mahā Boowa in London*. It is probably out of print now, but it can be downloaded or read online at www.forestdhamma.org.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

6th November, 1974

Dear Jane,

Thanks for the photos and the article. We now have an English friend living in Nong Khai who brings us copies of the *Sunday Telegraph* about once a month, so we are keeping up with the approach of doomsday! I am glad you got Resugga. I wonder if you have moved in yet. The photos look very attractive, and the house is quite large. I wonder if you intend putting some of the land to use. I should think that you could grow enough to run the place almost, or perhaps let out some of the land to local farmers in exchange for free milk, eggs, and whatnot. I have read a few articles about organic farming. I think that sooner or later farmers will have to go back to growing food in the old way, however reluctantly, before we are all poisoned by the chemicals they add to everything.

You say that Ian is generally depressed and under the weather. This, I believe, happens to many men about his age. They cease to have anything to look forward to, which means they see no purpose in life.

And this is probably strengthened by stopping drinking and smoking, particularly smoking.

With regard to the possibility of Resugga being used as a *vihāra*, I rather favour the idea as long as whatever arrangement is made suits both Ian and you, for the house belongs to you. I am rather reluctant to get involved in obtaining property for a Saṅgha until the right way to proceed becomes quite clear. As of now, I cannot see any course that I feel sure will succeed. The distance from London may, in fact, be an advantage in that anyone travelling the distance will do so with serious intent. Also, I cannot see how we can do without a place in London; buying a country place would probably necessitate selling Haverstock Hill. In addition, from my own point of view, I am not yet ready to commit myself to any long-term proposals in the United Kingdom. Of course, if the English Saṅgha Trust proceeded without me, whatever they did would relieve me of a burden, leaving me free to give assistance. I am not even sure that the United Kingdom is the right place to start. It has such a high population density that I foresee trouble in the future. I have toyed with the idea of the USA, although I don't really know the country.

Thank you very much for sending the large box of tea. It arrived in good condition, despite travelling in the rainy season, and is very welcome.

You say you don't want to do long periods of practice now: is this sloth and torpor? You must examine and see whether it is, or not. But, in any case, if you try to be mindful, using wisdom often to examine yourself to keep your mind on the subject of Dhamma, the formal practice is not so necessary.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

I should think I didn't want to do long periods of practice at night because I was exhausted by the amount of work I was doing during the day.

Unfortunately, our local farmer raised pigs so we couldn't get milk and eggs in return for letting him use our fields! Eventually we got our own animals, starting with two huge white Charolais cows, saved from the abattoir, which we called Moonbeam and Sunshine. Then Martha and Mary arrived from Hampshire, two pedigrees Jacob ewes. Wing and Beauty, two Exmoor ponies, endangered species like the sheep, came to us straight off the moor completely wild. We needed an expert to turn them into riding ponies.

Beauty, being quite unmanageable, was returned to the moor. So Uncle Nicholas, a very naughty donkey, took her place as a companion for Wing. We had chickens and ducks and my mother was given a peahen and a peacock for her 80th birthday. I became a beekeeper as well, which I found very interesting and challenging. We got stung a lot at first, but as we became more confident the bees seemed not to get so agitated.

Because we had so many farm buildings, we liked to bring the animals inside at

night in the winter, so there was an enormous amount of mucking out to be done. Our first years we lost a lot of lambs due to neglect – sheep are hopeless mothers, especially young ones, and we had to be up most of the night watching over the lambs. Then they seemed to get every disease under the sun – foot rot, flystrike, they had them all. The ponies got laminitis, the cows got mastitis. The rabbits ate everything in the vegetable garden, the birds ate the raspberries! We soon realised that farming is not for amateurs, and my year at a farm school was hardly adequate for the task we had taken on.

Besides all this, we seemed to be running a guest house for friends and relations who used our flats for Cornish holidays. Luckily most were self-catering, but there was still a lot of work involved. My mother's senile dementia was getting worse, though she was really remarkably easy to care for.

It's very difficult to keep the Precepts as a farmer. After all, I was robbing the bees and the hens. Then there was the problem of rats. I had two huge humane rat traps and managed to catch a few and took them to a wood about five miles away. But when a rat jumped out of the cupboard under the sink in the kitchen Ian said enough was enough and called in the pest control people!

We had a lot of land because the idea was that one day it might have become a

monastery. George Sharp was one of our first visitors to look it over. The monastery never came about; instead, we held retreats in the summer, and monks would occasionally come to stay overnight when they were walking tudong.

Ian planted a small wood, plus we had a vegetable garden and fruit trees. We did this for about thirty years, gradually reducing the land and number of animals. It was a very happy time, in spite of all the disasters, and it broke my heart to leave. But Ian's health deteriorated to the point where it seemed more sensible to find somewhere smaller and easier.

Some of the badly built farm buildings fell down at intervals and with the insurance money we were able to visit his family in Australia every two or three years! This suited me as I was able to stop off in Thailand.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

2nd December, 1974

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your letter. The whole business of setting up the Saṅgha in the West is beset with many problems and most of them involve unknown factors, such as whether enough people will be interested to provide the support needed to make it viable. I feel that we cannot look on Resugga as being more than a temporary place for the Saṅgha, to be used until we can determine whether the 'movement' grows to the extent that the monks need more room.

I hope you went to see the Karmapa Lama. I have heard many reports about him – all saying that he is very high and holy. I'm afraid I find the Tibetan Buddhist ceremonials rather off-putting, but that seems to be their way. I wonder if it will catch on in the West. I see that the leaflet you sent Philip had on the bottom of it 'admission by the brochure.' I wonder if you got in.

Your sister, Griselda, seems to possess a lot of restless energy. It is obvious that the 'Dhamma food' which she is given should be simple, easily understood and almost impossible to doubt. With her strong inherent energy, if she can develop more control she could do quite well in Dhamma.

I have been in Bangkok for the last two weeks. It looks as though Thailand is in for a very troublesome period for the next year or so. They have elections early next year and nobody expects the democracy to survive for long. How and whether it will affect us remains to be seen.

Hope you and Ian are well.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

It appears as though Acharn Paññā was somewhat ambivalent about returning to the West to teach. He was devoted to Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa and reluctant to leave Wat Pa Baan Taad unless the political situation forced the Western monks to move.

However, Acharn Sumedho, an American disciple of Tan Acharn Chah (who himself had spent some time with Tan Acharn Mun), took up the challenge, placing the Forest Saṅgha tradition firmly in the English countryside. With his North American 'can do' ethic, he soon built four monasteries in England. Not long after, monasteries were established in the United States, Switzerland and Italy; followed later by Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Portugal and now Norway. Wherever there are laypeople ready and willing to support a Theravāda monastery, and Forest Saṅgha monks prepared to become abbots, such monasteries will spring up. It has been an amazing achievement for Acharn Sumedho, who in 2016 at the age of 81 completed a worldwide tour which included South America.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
16th February, 1975

Dear Jane,

I have heard from George Sharp concerning his visit to Resugga and I rather agree with you (and him) that it is not the right place for the Saṅgha. As George said, it is too far from London and other populous areas, which will likely cut the Saṅgha off from the major part of their lay support. However, thank you for offering part of Resugga as a retreat, or refuge – this may be very valuable in the future. As things stand at present, I am unable to foresee the right way to proceed in developing the Saṅgha. For that reason, I am reluctant to suggest spending a lot of money on a big place when events are changing so fast and the future is so uncertain. As a start, I feel we should get a few acres of land plus a cottage in an area where land is not overly expensive.

I agree with you about George Sharp. He is very sympathetic and is now the mainstay of the English Saṅgha Trust. It is quite fortunate

that such a person is interested enough to put effort into running the organization.

In a letter to Philip, you talked about starting a fund-raising campaign for the Ārāma Fund. This is certainly a noble gesture, but I feel rather hesitant about it. Philip and I also thought of this when Ārāma was first formed. But we dropped the idea, mainly because we were in no position to put forward a concrete program. We felt we would be asking people to contribute to something which we could only vaguely define ourselves. I feel now that we are still in the same position.

Tan Acharn was invited to England, ostensibly to help make merit for Mrs. Cherry's birthday (70th, I believe).

Hope you are all well.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

29th July, 1975

Dear Jane,

I apologize for taking so long to answer your letters. My excuse is that we are building a wall around the perimeter of the monastery, and so far I am the Chief Engineer. Consequently, I've been too tired to write any letters. But now that we have entered the rains retreat, all work has stopped.

I asked Tan Acharn about your proposed stay here and I'm afraid his answer was not very promising. He asked me to tell you that it was difficult for women here, and that he could not promise to be here all the time. In fact, immediately after the rains retreat he will probably go to Bangkok for three weeks to a month. He also indicated that he may want me to go with him (which he has occasionally requested for the last year or two). I am not quite sure if the difficulties of staying here are the main consideration, or the danger. So far, the surface appearances here indicate that all is quiet and orderly, and the Thai authorities are certainly much less anti-American than they were

six months to a year ago. But Tan Acharn is concerned about the deteriorating moral standards in Thailand, as well as the steady erosion of respect for the Saṅgha, so he may be concerned for your safety here (although he has not said so).

No, we don't have any refugees from Laos. The borders are not yet completely closed and Thailand can quite easily absorb the numbers that enter. The total population of Laos is only 3-4 million.

I have thought quite a lot about where I might go when I finally leave here. I shall probably make for the UK to start with. But the land area is so small and the population large that countries like Australia, Canada and the US seem more suitable. But I expect that by that time events will point quite clearly where to go.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

28th August, 1975

Dear Jane,

As Ian will have no doubt have told you, Tan Acharn said it would be alright to come here in November. I only hope the political situation remains stable. The Laotian Communists are claiming a large chunk of Northeast Thailand as their territory and the Thais say, quite reasonably, that they will on no account give it up. It is a pretext to cause trouble; and Laos, with a population of three million, is hardly a match for Thailand at 50 million.

George Sharp is a nice person and seems to have Dhamma well at heart. He is also a good artist. His portrait of Tan Acharn should be quite good.

Tan Acharn's London talks have already been printed in Thai and people seem to like them very much. I feel they may be valuable in England.

Freda tells me that various Samatha groups have started up in England, and she has given copies of *Forest Dhamma* to some, which have been

very well received. It sounds as if people are less interested in the names and sects and want to work at the fundamentals for their own good, which is really excellent.

Yours,

Paññā

*Jane's Fourth Visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1975*

*Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1975*

Dear Jane

I think it is probably better if you don't move. You are more or less used to that *kuṭi* and a change would upset your practice. I'm sure the lady from Bangkok will not mind using the other *kuṭi* for a few days. After all, she can easily come here when it suits her, but you can hardly come more than once every four or five years.

Try to understand the meaning of the odd vision you wrote about. All the things that occurred in it come from your own mind. In other words, you must search to determine if all these things are not just aspects of your own character. After all, it's from there that they originate.

If you lack energy, you should check to see that you are taking enough food, and enough salt. If you are, then it is probably the type of heaviness and exhaustion which springs from the *kilesas*; that is, a resistance to practice that manifests as fatigue and physical feelings of weakness. You may find that this will go away if you alter your breathing rhythm (not when doing practice, but at other times). Sometimes exhaustion and feelings of lethargy accompany very shallow breathing. This kind of breathing can be a form of *taṇhā*. But you must examine it to see whether this is so.

Thanks for Freda's letter. Whatever place we get in England must be under the control of the Saṅgha if it is ever going to be more than a temporary residence.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

1st December, 1975

Dear Jane,

Your sister, Griselda, arrived here on schedule on 28th November and is, I believe, finding things a bit difficult, which doesn't surprise me. But I think she will be able to last until she leaves on the 10th.

I asked Tan Acharn about your return visit and he said that you should feel free to come now – or in the future – as is convenient. In other words, he does not feel that there is any special advantage for returning this December, rather than at some later date. For my part, I feel that you would probably do best to wait. Firstly, because I think Ian may be put out if you are away over Christmas and, secondly, much of Tan Acharn's time and energy is taken up by Khun Pow, who, as you probably know has terminal cancer. She is apparently being kept going on drugs, and the doctors say that once they become ineffective she cannot last long. So Tan Acharn is trying to keep her mind as buoyant and as free as possible, which means he has little spare time at present. He gives her a Dhamma talk every evening without fail.

Thank you for sending along the two books on transistors; they are just what I need. I'm afraid the subject matter is rather worldly, but around here it is the worldly skills that are sometimes missing. At least I am now able to get a large number of high quality recordings of Tan Acharn's excellent Dhamma talks. I hope to find the time to translate them one day.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

With his technical skills, Acharn Pañña set up the first proper recording system at Wat Pa Baan Taad. On my last few visits, Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa was filmed and recorded whenever he appeared in public. I suppose he got used to it.

Khun Pow stayed at Wat Pa Baan Taad for the last three months of her life, during which time Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa gave her 84 Dhamma talks to keep her spirits and encourage her to practice as the end of her life neared. It was very moving to see Khun Pow sitting throughout the talks with her hands up in the añjali position in spite of her weakness. Some of these talks can be read in a lovely little book called *Amata Dhamma* and Tan Acharn Ṭhānissaro translated some more and made them available in a collection called *Straight From the Heart*. Interestingly enough, Khun Pow's husband, who was a great supporter of Tan Acharn, was a Christian who owned the YWCA in Bangkok!

Wat Pa Baan Taad

18th July, 1976

Dear Jane,

I haven't written for a long time. But, then again, I've written almost no letters over the last four to five months. I've been working on the wall non-stop through the hot season when temperatures have reached up to 110 degrees on my veranda. Now with the rainy season the weather has cooled off and work on the wall has stopped.

Tan Acharn said you could come almost any time, but I suggest a time around the end of October. I am sure your friend in Bangkok would be glad to help you again. She knows exactly what to do and who to contact.

You say that Freda thinks that we may never have to move from Thailand. I suppose that this is possible, but I'm not convinced. Thailand is so unsettled now. Although the people are ninety per cent anti-Communist, there are still a lot of agitators and insurgents, so I think most people expect trouble before very long.

I was glad to hear that you were in Resugga and that you had got some of the remaining land. I don't think you need worry about making bad *kamma* by letting your fields to the farmer who puts beef cattle out to graze on them. The farmer probably makes some bad *kamma* by this but, as he is not directly involved in killing them, it is still not all that serious.

Khun Pow still seems to be doing alright, despite the fact that about nine months ago the doctors gave her only six months to live. It is obvious that a person's mental state is very important where cancer is concerned. Whenever Dhamma is lacking, organization tends to break up, causing disruptive cliques and groups to form as they try to break up the existing state. Cancer in the body closely parallels communism in the world – which will also probably break up internally and destroy its own organization before very long.

Thank you for sending the print of the portrait of Tan Acharn by George Sharp. He has done a very good job of it – working only from photographs – and he has chosen a difficult subject. I would say it is not

quite correct, but then what can an artist do without the subject being present and without constructive criticism while he is working on it? That is, after all, how the Italian painters became Masters.

Hope you are all well. Please give my regards to Ian.

Yours,

Panna

Jane's Recollections

George Sharp's portrait of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa was good in that it showed his determination, energy and vigour. However, I hope George won't mind my saying that it misses the compassion and tenderness that is also part of his character, something that Tan Acharn demonstrated in his love of children and animals, and in his concern for the sick.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

20th November, 1976

Dear Jane,

Tan Acharn has given you permission to come in December. Please let us know your date of arrival so that we can arrange a car to meet you at the airport – unless you don't mind taking a taxi. If you do come by taxi, it may be better to go into Udon (Thani) with the airport bus and ask 'Songserm Service' to get one. They are very nice people there.

One thing I must warn you about: there have been a lot of cases of poisoning in Udon recently (also in Sakon Nakhorn and Khon Kaen) and you should avoid eating out at any restaurant in North-East Thailand. Nor should you drink water unless you are sure of the source. In fact, it is far better to drink bottled soft drinks if you want a drink in Udon. As far as I know there are no reports of poisoning from Bangkok. I doubt whether there is much danger in the Wat.

I suggest you bring some warm clothing as it tends to get chilly in the evenings. The temperature drops to below 60 degrees at night and

warms up in the day to 80 degrees. Coming from England, you probably won't find it especially cold. But keep in mind there's a lot of difference between a well-insulated English house and our well-ventilated huts.

Yours,

Paññā

*Jane's Fifth Visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad
December 1976 to January 1977*

*Wat Pa Baan Taad
30th January, 1977*

Dear Jane,

I have just finished reading your meditation journal. It made me think of the simile of a computer. A computer is made and provided with many built-in functions. It is then programmed by information being fed into it through five inputs. Steadily a vast amount of information is accumulated and stored in the machine. The computer is analogous to the five *khandhas*, with the exception that, unlike the machine, the *khandhas* have *kilesas* associated with them. Because of the *kilesas*, whatever is brought up for consideration is always twisted into something personal. In other words, one's sense of self always enters the picture, either liking or disliking, interested or disinterested. Is

there something in it for me, or not? When this happens in normal circumstances in the world, it gives rise to people's normal behaviour patterns. But, when one practises for *samādhi*, all sorts of memories can come up from the past (the computer data base), which then get mixed up with the present and create a kaleidoscope effect composed of images, feelings, emotions, impressions, and ideas.

I suspect this is more or less what's been happening to you. Since this is just your character, I doubt whether you can actually do anything about it. But I suggest that you not pay attention to many of the negative things that occur during meditation; in particular, emotions and feelings of guilt, feelings of being unworthy, of not working hard enough, and so on. Those are examples of painful feelings being enlisted as supports for your sense of self. In other words, "I feel guilty" should really be translated as: "There is a painful feeling (described as 'guilt') which the many different and connected parts that I call 'self' believe that it owns." So you must try to recognise the tricks of the *kilesas*, of which feelings of guilt and unworthiness are examples.

I would also suggest that you examine the implications in your practice of conceit, vanity and pride. It seems to me that the essence of Buddhist practice entails the elimination of just those three defilements, because

they all point directly to 'self,' and their destruction is directly linked to *anattā*. To be strictly correct, they are all *anattā* all the time. What I mean to say is, when those defilements are eliminated, the fictional 'self' is eliminated as well. Greed is craving for that which increases conceit, vanity and pride; hatred is craving to get rid of that which reduces them. I hope you have a pleasant journey back to England.

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

During my six week stay at Wat Pa Baan Taad, Acharn Paññā would sometimes come down and talk to us during the day and these are some of things he said.

If the English Saṅgha Trust wished to wait for him on the off chance that he would return to England eventually that was their affair, though he could promise nothing. Acharn Paññā said he would go wherever he was needed by people who took the practice seriously. He wasn't interested in teaching people who were only mildly interested.

He said people cannot be ordered to observe the *dhutaṅga* austerity practices; rather their practice was an individual matter that should not be boasted about.

He said Tan Acharn taught that we should investigate pain not with the objective of getting rid of it, but instead for the purpose of learning from it.

Each person's *kamma* is linked to how diligently one keeps the Five Precepts.

Tan Paññā mentioned how important it was for us to generate our own *virīya*, energy, to practise otherwise we would be helpless on our own.

He said that Tan Acharn had warned that with the world as uncertain and unstable

as it is, it is more important than ever that we should develop a place of refuge in our hearts.

He told the story of the *Ti-piṭaka* master who left the Buddha and went to a group of Arahants living deep in the forest because he wanted to learn how to practise meditation. In order to humble the *Ti-piṭaka* master's conceit, each Arahant in turn refused to teach him until finally sending him to a *sāmaṇera*, who was also an Arahant. He too insisted he was too uneducated to teach the scholar, but he agreed to try. Seeing that the *Ti-piṭaka* master was fully dressed in expensive robes, the *sāmaṇera* tested his humility by ordering to wade into a nearby pond. When the *Ti-piṭaka* master did as he was told, the *sāmaṇera*, satisfied with his humility, called him back before he got wet and agreed to teach him. The *sāmaṇera* had him imagine an anthill with six holes, inside which lived a lizard. He said that a clever person who wanted to catch the lizard should block up all the holes except one and then watch that one hole carefully. The bhikkhu understood that the six holes represented the six senses. So he sat down and aroused *samādhi* and watched the one hole left open which was the mind-door itself. Eventually, the *sāmaṇera* took the monk to the Buddha, who asked him how his pupil was getting on. The *sāmaṇera* said he was doing quite well as he was humble and

practised hard. The Buddha then preached a discourse. While he was listening, the *Ti-piṭaka* master attained enlightenment.

Acharn Paññā said that the free *citta* was like pure water, which one can see when it is still and the mud settles.

He also said that dwelling on the bad things one had done in the past was Māra's way of preventing one from practising truly.

Before I left Acharn Paññā said he thought that my practice had gone well, but that I should not attempt the same thing at home without a teacher to watch over me and tell me where I had gone wrong. He said the fruits of the practice would take some time to appear, so I must be patient. The practice was obviously difficult for me, but that wasn't necessarily due to bad *kamma*. He insisted that it was good *kamma* that I could still make progress in the practice in spite of the difficulties.

My faithful old companion, a big brown dog, came twice a day to take up station by my *kuṭi* steps where I would share my plate of food with him. I kept feeding him even on the days that I fasted, even though it would have been easier not to have handled food at all! He came only during the day, which made me think he came up from the village, since the gates were closed at night.

People often asked what the food was like at the Wat. To give an example, I made up the following list from what was on my tray on a special *Wan Phra* observance day:

- Glutinous and plain boiled rice.
- Hard-boiled eggs and chopped-up omelette.
- Ground liver made into a soft paste.
- Noodles with bits of chicken, pork and veggies.
- Veal stew with cucumber and white vermicelli.
- Crispy dried fish.
- Beef stew.
- Veal stew with green peppers.
- Salad with lettuce, shredded cabbage and cucumber.
- A bread roll (for the Westerner!), rice crispies, coconut jelly and coconut cake.
- Bananas, oranges, grapes.
- Sweet coconut in a banana leaf.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

2nd May, 1977

Dear Jane,

Thank you so much for sending the battery for my tape recorder, and please say 'thank you' to Ian and Tanya also. I did not think it would be so expensive – or even if it is expensive by present day standards. I am so out of touch with prices nowadays that I no longer know what things should cost. The 'Uher' is a very good tape recorder and I now use it to record all of Tan Acharn's talks to the monks. One advantage of the 'Uher' is that it's lightweight (4 ½ lbs) and small enough to fit into my monk's handbag with room to spare, which is very convenient for keeping it out of sight when I record Tan Acharn in public.

As usual, I have been rather slow in replying to your letters. Although the wall around the perimeter of the monastery was finished right on schedule, I still had the two gates to construct – one in the back (south) wall, which I have now finished, and the large double gates at the entrance, which need new hinges and a lot of difficult adjustment (difficult because they weigh about 300 lbs each). The back gate turned

out very well, but I had to make a special lock and keys for it because I just could not find anything suitable in the shops.

I hope Ian's knee is better now. Gout is, I believe, very painful but in the long run it may be preferable to arthritis because gout has a known specific cause, whereas the doctors do not seem able to do much about arthritis.

Yours,

Panna

Wat Pa Baan Taad

28th March, 1978

Dear Jane,

I cannot remember when I last wrote to you. It must be many months now.

You said in one or two of your letters that you were preparing that room in Resugga for whenever I return to England. I still have little idea when I shall return, but I have a feeling that I may need a retreat in Cornwall. For that matter, Cornwall may be a good place to 'plant' the Saṅgha in England!

You asked why it was that you cannot explain Dhamma to other people. That ability is probably a matter of innate tendencies (most likely based on *kamma*), and I doubt whether you can do much about it. We read that Acharn Mun was superb at giving talks and explanations of Dhamma, but Acharn Sao (his teacher) would speak only a couple of sentences and go silent; and this despite the fact that he was also an Arahant. It is just possible that, as your *citta* develops more in Dhamma, you will be

able to teach in a style of your own. Time alone will tell.

(I got this far with this letter and then, the following day, I came down with tonsillitis – so I am taking it up again a week later. We’ve been having very hot weather this week with temperatures reaching 104 degrees, which does not conduce to much activity.)

The Buddha relic that Don Riches brought you should be placed about on a level with the Buddha image on your shrine table and above all the other objects there. There are a lot of Buddha-*dhātu* in Thailand; and although I suspect not all of them are genuine, I do believe that a lot of them, in fact, are.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

I gave my relic of the Buddha to Acharn Amaro to take to America when he went to start Abhayagiri Monastery in Redwood Valley, California. I also gave him a Buddha Rūpa that was sculpted by the King of Thailand. I was pleased that he left them behind in California when he moved back to Amaravati as abbot because I think Americans are more likely to be open to the Dhamma.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

18th July, 1978

Dear Jane,

Thanks for your letter. I would have written earlier, but we are in the process of constructing six large rain water collection tanks made of concrete which must be finished before the rainy season begins – hopefully!

As far as I know Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa has never told any of his disciples that they should teach, who they should teach, or where they should teach. Rather, it is inherently understood that when the disciple has reached such a position that he is capable of teaching, he will know for himself what's the right thing to do. There is no need for the teacher to say anything. But Tan Acharn does tell his disciples when they should not teach, particularly if they show tendencies in that direction before they are ready to teach.

If you find that you like nursery gardening or other forms of horticulture, I see no reason why you should not do this. It is blameless

as far as *sīla* is concerned. I assume it is also a quiet, non-disturbing activity that tends to promote calm more than disturbing it.

As regards ‘cooking’: I can assure you that if I get the opportunity to stay at Resugga, I shan’t expect you to get up so early to do the cooking – nor would I expect one tenth of the fuss that people made for our meals in London. That was a special occasion, and no one could keep that up for very long. In fact, in the *Piṭaka* it is said that a bhikkhu should be easy to look after, his wants should not be excessive and he should act so as not to be a burden on the lay supporters.

Tan Acharn has not been complaining much about his back trouble recently but I don’t think he is very fit. He is getting old (65) and he gets little rest. I suppose this is just the result of his *kamma*.

Yours,

Paññā

Wat Pa Baan Taad

11th March, 1979

Dear Jane,

Recently I have been translating the *London Book*. I have now finished the translation, although I still have to check both the translation and the English grammar and spelling. Hopefully, it can be printed in time for the rains retreat.

I hope your heart trouble (and Freda's) is under control now. I am told that the drugs for angina are very good now, with few side effects, but I can't help wondering what the real causes of this are. I know that worry can be an important factor, but there are so many other possibilities, such as food (with all the chemicals that are used nowadays), atmospheric pollution, radiation, and several other more remote ones. As a rather unorthodox help in reducing the angina, I'd suggest that you read the *Dhammapāda Commentary* (in English translation if you can get a copy), or the *Jātaka* stories. The reason being that those stories tend to stick in your mind and induce you to think of Dhamma and grow in faith – all of which induce a state of calm.

George Sharp was here a short while ago and brought all the news of the Saṅgha in England. I don't expect I will leave here just yet, for, although I would like to spend some time in England, I feel that I must try and use this opportunity here with Tan Acharn while I can for the various prognostications for the future are not good. Several Acharns in Thailand have said that a major war may break out in the next 5 years. Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, of course, never makes such predictions, although at times he does drop hints about the world situation which he could have worked out by reason – or perhaps by other means!

Some time ago you asked me whether oestrogen injections would be permissible for a Buddhist. I would say that if the doctor thinks that they are necessary, then it is probably best to take his advice. The point to realise in Dhamma is that oestrogen is just a chemical which causes physical changes in the body. These changes may give rise to feelings (associated with sex most probably), but they are merely bodily functions that are morally neutral. But, if in that circumstance your thoughts are tainted by *kilesas*, the thoughts themselves are *akusala*. If such feelings give rise to sexual thoughts, then ask yourself: What are bodily feelings anyway? If you look at it from the point of view of Dhamma, all bodily feelings are more or less equal. The feeling might as

well be a pain in your foot or a soreness on your arm – why let the mind get so wrapped up in it? Instead, using mindfulness and wisdom, you should observe them and contemplate them without getting caught up in those feelings. This leads to detachment from bodily feelings, which is a very skilful state of mind.

I hope you are all well.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

The angina pains came on while I was caring for my mother and coping with all the holiday visitors, as well as looking after the animals we had acquired over the years. The drugs I took were very effective, as was just stopping whatever I was doing and taking a short rest.

There wasn't much time then for reading but I am looking forward to reading the *Jātakas* and the histories of the *Dhammapāda* quotations shortly.

I never did have the oestrogen injections.

Wat Pa Baan Taad

4th August, 1979

Dear Jane,

The news you received about Tan Acharn's sickness was definitely exaggerated. It is actually very difficult to say truly how well, or sick, Tan Acharn is. As long as he has enough rest and not too many visitors, he seems quite well and strong. He has what he describes as a "heart ailment," but to me the external symptoms seem to indicate stomach trouble, or perhaps low blood sugar. With anyone else I'd say that the trouble is not in the heart, but with Tan Acharn I reserve judgment because his power of body investigation is so strong.

I was sorry to hear the difficulties you are experiencing at this time. My advice is to try to keep your mind and thinking in the present. In other words, do each thing you do with interest, and do it well. This focus will help to minimise the *dukkha*. When the *kilesas* arise, the burden of the present is overloaded with memories and imagination, causing an increase in pain and suffering. You must be careful to avoid overexerting yourself physically and refrain from fasting or cutting

down on food at present. This is not the right time for it.

You mentioned in your letter the problem you have when waking up after your afternoon nap. I suspect that the pressure in the pit of your stomach is a result of what you've told me with regard to Ian. Jealousy is, of course, a strong *kilesa*, and the present circumstances are obviously giving full cause for it to arise. But instead of succumbing to its power, take this as an opportunity to confront this *kilesa*.

Note how, when jealousy arises, it comes up with the full force of feelings and emotions behind it, and how at that moment it takes full command of your thinking and imagination – so much so that little remains inside your mind except jealousy. But before it gets out of hand, there will be the voice of Dhamma telling you that this is wrong so you should not give way. The Dhamma arises simply as a 'voice of conscience.' It has no powerful feelings and emotions to back it up. It relies upon you to supply the willpower to turn in the direction of Dhamma. In essence, the 'voice of Dhamma' is your true nature.

Jealousy is a demon, an imposter that makes a lot of noise and trouble to grab hold of your attention and lead you in its direction. (This is similar to the way the communists in trade unions shout and rave in order to prevent any voice of reason from being heard with the aim

of taking over the proceedings and grasping power.) But one who is mindful and wise listens only to reason and is not fooled by all the noise.

I am fairly fortunate in that Uranus makes a weak trine¹⁵ to my ascendant (which is Scorpio) in the natal chart so most of the trouble I get is only of the mild nuisance variety, like people asking me to mend their tape recorders.

I received a letter from Griselda. She tells me that she'll be going to help look after your mum fairly shortly. I hope the situation eases for you soon. Until then, try to recollect the enormous difficulties that the Buddha had to put up with, and how much he praised putting up with hardship.

Yours,

Paññā

15. Trine: an astrological term, denoting or relating to the trigon aspect of two planets distant from each other 120 degrees.

Jane's Recollections

I heard that someone recommended a Chinese doctor for Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa's heart ailment at that time and that his remedies kept Tan Acharn going for another 32 years, enabling him to travel around Thailand raising funds for the failing economy and at the same time encouraging people to lead their lives according to the principles of Dhamma.

The difficulties I was experiencing at this time were caused by excruciating jealousy which was eventually cured on a walking meditation path in the forest at Wat Pa Baan Taad when I paid another visit to Wat Pa Baan Taad in the winter of 1977/1978. I received no letters from Acharn Paññā at that time, but he would visit my *kuṭi* from time to time, and below is some of the advice he gave.

When explaining Dhamma to someone, use your own language to explain what you mean.

He asked me why I was no longer meditating on the 32 parts of the body. Oh dear, it was ever thus!

He said most of the *dukkha* I was experiencing in the practice was probably due to

past *kamma*. At the same time, I should realise that ‘the one who knows’ (the *citta*) is not experiencing the pain, because it is confined merely to feelings (*vedanā*). Nevertheless, I should not forget that *Dukkha* is the First Noble Truth.

As regards ordaining as a nun, one should only attempt that when one is free of all worldly responsibilities and when one is healthy enough not to be a burden to the monastery on account of old age or infirmity.

One could say that the practice was going well when one was in control of oneself and able to put one’s mind on something and keep it there.

Thoughts about events are the cause of mental pain, not the events themselves.

Wat Pa Baan Taad
November 1979

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your letter telling me of the death of your mother. The usual thing to say is that one is sorry to hear the news; but really, why should one be sorry to hear that someone has gotten rid of (or gotten free from) an awful old broken-down body, which must have been the source of a great deal of suffering. It is only in those cases where a person has lived a life of unbridled materialism, and thus has little merit to rely on for the next life, that one should feel true pity. But your mother was not such a person. From what you say, she died quite calmly despite the pain she experienced when she was approaching death.

I have been checking through the typescript of the collection of my old letters that you sent me. I really do not feel that these letters should be published as a book. Too much of their content is not generally applicable, and in several instances the teaching on meditation is simply wrong. For various reasons, that did not matter in your case, but

it could be misleading for other people who might try to practice them. In fact, my understanding of Dhamma and the practice has evolved over the years that I have spent here at Wat Pa Baan Taad under Acharn Mahā Boowa's guidance. Gradually a deeper understanding and a greater clarity of Dhamma and of the correct methods of practice have developed that call into question some of my earlier answers to your letters. For that reason, they might be harmful rather than beneficial.

I feel that people are often too ready to publish books without having sufficiently thought out what good and what harm their books may do. You must remember that Dhamma, when picked up wrongly, can cause harm. It is analogous to a snake which when picked up by the tail turns and bites the handler, but when picked up by the head can easily be handled without coming to any harm.

I will try to arrange a selection from the letters for printing. But I shall not be able to do much about it until February, because I am obliged to have my translations of the talks that Tan Acharn gave on our trip to London in book form and ready for the printers by then. I think it is a superb book for the Western reader. Although it runs to only 170 pages, it has so much that the ordinary person can relate to. I don't want to spend a lot of time on the letters either, because I feel that there is so

much valuable material of Tan Acharn's that needs translating and I would rather spend my time translating it into English. I am interested to hear the comments of the printer to whom you sent the letters. I expect him to say that the letters contain a lot of irrelevant material that needs to be weeded out.

As to publishing some of the letters in Brian Dyas' journal, I feel that it would be best to make a selection of passages and topics that are generally useful to other people, while omitting those parts which are more personal and not really relevant. I realise that this does not follow the modern trend in publishing where writers are encouraged to reveal every private detail of their lives, warts and all, in order to make a book 'grab one's attention,' and without which the book would be too dull to interest anyone. But books on Dhamma should never be placed in that category. They should stand or fall on their own merits. Thus, if the Dhamma presented in these letters is not of interest to others, so be it.

I think it would be best if I chose the most appropriate passages in the copy you sent me, corrected them and send it back to you.

Yours,

Paññā

Jane's Recollections

This is where the collection of Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho's letters and my recollections of the events that occasioned them ends. It is very appropriate that Acharn Paññā's final letter laid out so clearly his objections to having them printed. Hopefully our good editors have managed to weed out the irrelevant parts and retained all the good Dhamma they contain.

Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho's biography, written by Acharn Dick Sīlaratano, is now available under the title *Uncommon Wisdom*, with an introduction by Acharn Sumedho. It is available for free download at www.forestdhamma.org.



ส่งทางอากาศไปรษณีย์
VIA AIR MAIL

Jane at Wat Baan Tard 1976



Jane's Epilogue

Acharn Paññā's life and mine ran more or less in tandem. I was actually booked to go to the same Buddhist Society Summer School in 1955 that Peter Morgan went to before he ordained and became Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho. But I had two children from a former marriage and we had just found the perfect step-father for them. Agreeing with their excellent choice, I cancelled my booking for the Summer School and got married again! Although the marriage was successful – it lasted for over fifty years – I found to my dismay I still had my fair share of suffering.

I went back to my Dhamma studies, but that wasn't enough. I knew that I needed to start doing meditation practice, so once again in 1958 I booked into the Buddhist Society Summer School. On that occasion, Acharn Paññā was present as the Theravāda teacher. Although lots of other schools of Buddhism were taught at the Summer School that year, Acharn Paññā's talk on the Law of Dependent Origination impressed me very deeply. When I heard he was going to lead ten-day retreats in Oxford, I made sure I was in attendance at both of them. From then on, I regarded Acharn Paññā as my primary teacher.

I must add that this has not stopped me from learning from other teachers as well, both Mahāyāna and Theravāda. However, my trust and respect for Acharn

Paññāvaḍḍho never diminished, and I would continue to consult him if I had any particular problem.

It is curious that Acharn Paññā was born in India and I was born in Burma, only two weeks apart.

Both of our fathers were engineers – mine was a Sapper (Royal Engineer) whilst Acharn Paññā's was a mining engineer. We both had uncles who were parsons and spent much of our childhoods with them when our parents were abroad. I understand from Acharn Paññā's sister that it was the sudden death of his father that started him looking for alternatives to Christianity. In my case, it was the death of my much loved 18-year-old cousin.

At eight o'clock on the morning of August 18th, 2004, Acharn Sumedho rang me at home to tell me that Acharn Paññā had died, which was hard for me to accept when the last I heard his cancer was in remission and his health was much better. Sadly, feeling so much better contributed to his death, because consequently he stopped taking the drugs prescribed by a Chinese doctor, thinking he had no further need of them.

A few days later it dawned on me that the time of his death in Thailand coincided with a curious incident in the early morning of that day when the tall window by

my bed flew open and a blast of cool air woke me up. I decided someone must have come in and asked my husband to get up and go and have a look. This he did. But he found no one and shut the window while I went back to sleep. When Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa heard what had happened, he said Acharn Paññā must have come to say goodbye to one of his closest disciples!

These Letters from the Forest have been edited by me to a certain extent, mainly the ones that were written prior to Acharn Paññā coming under the guidance of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa. Other trusted disciples of his have helped as well. I do hope I may be forgiven if I have transgressed in anyway by printing them at this time.

My contribution, taken from my notebooks kept at the time, has caused me considerable embarrassment at times, but George Sharp said that I should tell my side of the story ‘warts and all’ and this is what I have done!

Every night I bow in admiration and gratitude before the photographs of Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa and Luang Por (Venerable Father) Paññāvaḍḍho to whom I owe so much. Also on my shrine table are photos of Acharn Chah and Acharn Sumedho, to whom I feel immense gratitude for bringing the Thai Forest Tradition to the West, and over time, all around the world.

Jane at Wat Baan Tard 1976



*My Visit to a Meditation Wat in
North East Thailand in 1965.
A Talk Given by Jane Browne in 1966*

The invitation came last summer.

A friend and I were asked if we would like to fly out to Thailand to spend some time in a forest Meditation Wat in the North-East. The Abbot, Tan Acharn Mahā Boowa, was known to us through his book, *Wisdom Develops Samādhi*, and he had been advising us both on the theory and practice of Buddhism by letter for several years.

I was quite overwhelmed at first, but my excitement began to fade a little as the consequences of accepting the invitation came up clearly in my mind.

My gradual approach to Buddhism had been very private and uneventful. Certainly, since I first came across the teachings of the Buddha in 1951, my interest had never waned, but I seldom took part in any Buddhist social activities and, until last year, had no Buddhist friends apart from my teachers. But now I was suddenly invited to do something which, as my sister later rather unkindly

pointed out, smacked of ‘spiritual ambition,’ something that would expose my faith to all sorts of pressures and tensions hitherto avoided – like, I might say, being asked to give this talk!

I must admit too that I wondered how I should feel when the time came for me to leave the Buddhist community and the teacher from whose influence I had already benefitted so much. For in Buddhism, a living teacher can give the inspiration and guidance which is essential to clearing away the dross, so that one can come to a deeper understanding of the Dhamma. We remember the Buddha with respect, not only for his teaching, but also because he made his great discovery alone.

But apart from these selfish considerations, wasn’t it straining the generosity and tolerance of my husband beyond normal limits, to expect him to let me go into the jungles of Southeast Asia at that particular time. But at lunchtime one day when I mentioned the project as casually as possible, my husband agreed that it was an adventure not to be missed, and said that I might go provided I went with Freda Wint, the friend who had also been invited. Meanwhile, he decided to take some leave and visit his family in Australia while I was in Thailand.

There followed a very busy three months, added to which my daughter was getting married in September. I had to try and fit in all the inoculations, collect the

equipment necessary for what I imagined would be a fairly primitive existence in the jungle, and, if possible, learn some of the Pāli language. When all preparations were completed at the end of October, just as the monsoon season was finishing, we arrived in Bangkok. Our welcome was warm and friendly, and from the moment we arrived until we left, Tan Acharn's kind supporters looked after us. There was always someone to drive us about and to help with last minute shopping and visas, or to take us sight-seeing. We were intensely grateful, for the oppressive steamy heat made us feel limp and exhausted, and we were hampered by not speaking a word of Thai.

It had been arranged that we should travel up by car to Udon Thani, about 270 miles north of Bangkok, with a party of people who were attending Kaṭhina ceremonies in the area. These are yearly celebrations which take place after the rainy season, when the lay people offer robe material to the monks. It is a custom which is said to have been started by the Buddha himself, 2,500 years ago. The Kaṭhina is the measuring frame on which the monks cut out the material they need to make up into their three robes.

There were about twenty of us in the party, which included Britons, Americans, Canadians and Germans, and which was organised by two Thai doctors. The vans

were stacked with robe material, gifts and food for the monasteries. Practising Buddhists in Thailand take the making of merit very seriously for, believing in rebirth as they do, they know that their good deeds will win them a happy future life. The more discriminating support only those monasteries that have a good reputation. The monasteries rely entirely on lay support, because as far as I know, there is no central organization, and new monasteries spring up wherever a teacher decides to settle with his pupils.

It was an overcast day for our drive, and it was pleasantly cool. At lunchtime we stopped in a little garden, surrounded by the lush green paddy fields. We all sat on a thatch-covered platform while the good doctors' wives handed round banana leaf plates with a delicious mixture of cold curries and rice with tangerines to follow. At dusk, excitement rose rapidly as our little cavalcade drew to a halt on the outskirts of Udon. The word went round that Tan Acharn had come personally to meet us. We clambered over the parcels and out on to the roadside – and there he was, standing, quite unperturbed, with two attendant monks towering behind him. He was a small man, clad in the dull brown robes of the Forest Bhikkhu, and even with that rather unpromising backdrop of lorries and motorbikes roaring by, he was remarkable for his presence and dignity. He spoke to each of us in turn. It

was a characteristic of Tan Acharn's to make all his followers feel that they had a special place in his heart, which must account for the proprietary air with which I noticed they tended to speak of him.

We all then proceeded to a house in Udon city run by a widow as a hostel for pilgrims to the monasteries in that area. There was a big assembly hall, and here Tan Acharn held court. We were joined by many townspeople. After about an hour of general talk, Tan Acharn asked who would like to return with him to the monastery that night. Freda and I, and an English Buddhist nun who had spent a year at the monastery, volunteered, and also an elderly American Quaker.

It was an eventful journey. We crammed ourselves into two jeeps, Tan Acharn personally supervising the safe stowing of the luggage, and set off out of the town, passing on the way a huge American airbase, the planes from which we learned, with difficulty, to ignore as they roared low over the monastery. Soon after we left the main road the jeeps had to be abandoned for long dug-out canoes, so that we could cross the floods left by the monsoon. The last three miles into the jungle we covered on foot, Tan Acharn leading with a torch and the two bhikkhus bringing up the rear. The sand was warm and soft under our bare feet, and it was blessedly peaceful after the long drive and the racket of Bangkok. The still tropical

night closed round us, only disturbed by the frogs and cicadas and an occasional dog barking in the distance. In spite of hair-raising stories we had been told about gangs of bandits which roamed the district, we felt quite safe with Tan Acharn. In fact, the 'bandits' were mostly unfortunates who had been made homeless by the new dams recently built to combat the influence of the communist infiltrators.

We passed through a small village unnoticed as the people appeared to be at some meeting. Soon afterwards a voice behind me said, "Wat Pa Baan Taad." We were crossing a small wooden bridge and some bhikkhus were standing at the side carrying big green parasols. They called out greetings and then hurried on ahead of us. A grassy road lined with tall trees led up to a clearing in which we could see the big open Assembly Hall of the Wat outlined against the brilliant starlit sky. It was raised on stilts high above the ground as were most of the houses in Thailand.

Before following Tan Acharn up the steps we splashed water over our hot and dusty feet. This was the custom before entering any house in the country. The floor of the *sālā* was on three levels. A few oil lamps cast pools of light on the polished dark red teak. Thick round pillars supported the roof. A bhikkhu was lighting candles in front of a huge golden figure of the Buddha who smiled

benignly down on us. Prompted by the nun, we went *par terre* three times – this she said we must do whenever we entered or left the *sālā*.

Tan Acharn settled comfortably on some cushions above us. He had walked more than twice as far as we had and he suffered from heart trouble, but his only concern was that the walk hadn't tired us too much. He couldn't understand why we hadn't chosen to ride in the little bullock carts that had been waiting for us and were now trundling up the path with our luggage. We sat resting quietly, sipping the drinks provided by the monks, while they went to fetch our old teacher, Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho, who some of you may remember speaking to this society a few years ago. He came accompanied by a young American bhikkhu who had recently joined the Wat. Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho was able to interpret for us. Tan Acharn hardly knew any English, but he assured us that this was no drawback as he taught from the heart.

Soon we were shepherded down to our hut in the nuns' quarters. There we were greeted by the head nun and Tan Acharn's eighty-year-old mother, for whom, when she became a widow, he had started the little community of nuns. Everything necessary had been thoughtfully provided. Spotless mosquito nets were strung up over cotton quilts. A roll of Delsey and a cake of nice-smelling

soap, sat on the veranda amongst the stacks of china and tins of condensed milk and sugar.

Tan Acharn gave us a stern warning about snakes. He said most of them were shy, but that some held their ground, and that these were the most poisonous. I only saw one while I was there, but I heard them many times softly crackling across the veranda. I heard too the cries of small animals in the night that must have fallen prey to them.

In spite of the fifteen-hour journey, we didn't sleep much that night. There seemed to be a lot of animal activity in the hut which had been uninhabited for several months. The noise of the insects was so great that once I dreamt that I was lying on a factory floor.

The next day the little nun was up at six preparing special food for the two Western monks, a practice I'm afraid we did not continue with after she left. There were about six Thai nuns, two of them were young but the rest must have been over seventy. Except for Khun Mae Kaew, the head nun, and Tan Acharn's mother, they were not allowed to take part in the few ceremonies that took place in the Wat, and remained in their compound all the time except when they carried food up to the *sālā*. This incensed my feminist friend and I think she might well have formed

a Nuns' Trades Union if she had stayed longer and could have spoken Thai. They were given no meditation instruction, but they must have absorbed a good deal from the atmosphere. They were dignified and self-possessed, and spoke and laughed from the heart without restraint. I found I learnt much by just watching them go about their daily tasks.

One of the young ones, Khun Boon, was in charge of the kitchen and also looked after the visitors. She saw that we had fresh drinking water and paraffin for our lamps. When I had finished a box of cream crackers she ordered another from town, paying for it out of her own money. Unlike the bhikkhus, the nuns are allowed to have money, probably in order to buy food as they are not permitted to go to the villages for food.

Khun Boon was intuitively sympathetic. Loneliness and depression would sometimes descend on me during my month's stay in the Wat. She always seemed to know, and would spend a little extra time standing by the veranda, sometimes laying her cool hand on my arm and repeating a few English words taught her by Freda; or else, talking earnestly in Thai. I've no idea what she was telling me, but it was very comforting.

Sam, the American Quaker, stayed for about a week and shared our daily meal. Once while the bhikkhus were out on their almsround, he took us on a tour of

the monk's part of the Wat. Each bhikkhu had his own hut in a clearing, spaced some distance apart, and approached by little winding jungle paths. The huts varied in size from the large and well-built to a mere bamboo platform covered by a mosquito net. They all had paths for walking meditation about the length of a cricket pitch. Mindful walking is an important type of meditation practice, both for inducing calm and arousing insight.

All the huts were in use, as the bhikkhus must spend the rainy season retreat, which corresponds with the Buddhist Lent, in the Wat. After the rainy season, many of them leave to spend the rest of the year alone in the jungle. That year, Bhikkhu Paññāvaḍḍho was going too, for the first time.

The Bhikkhus had definite duties about the Wat, such as sweeping the jungle paths, building new huts, and cleaning the *sālā* hall. These they were expected to carry out meticulously and with as little noise as possible. Tan Acharn was a perfectionist, and a monk who did not do his fair share of the work was asked to leave. But he believed in relaxation when the work was done. His occasional evening meetings with the bhikkhus were easy and informal.

The bhikkhus' day followed a certain pattern, but the length of time devoted to each duty varied from day to day. They started their meditation practice at two in

the morning. At seven they went on *piṇḍapāta*, walking in silent single file to the local village and collecting food in the big steel bowls they carried hung in a sling from their shoulders. It made an unforgettable picture: the first rays of the early morning sun catching their saffron robes and making them flame against the still blue water of the flooded fields. An hour later they assembled in the *sālā* for their one meal of the day. This was a formal occasion when, after a short chant, they ate in silence. There was a further four-hour period of meditation in the middle of the day.

In the afternoon the sound of sweeping could be heard from all over the Wat, and a cloud of dust began to rise as all the paths were cleared of the daily accumulation of footprints, leaves and twigs. This was an excellent form of exercise in which everyone took part, including Tan Acharn. I had heard of its use in Zen monasteries, but never in a Theravādin country. It was one of the many examples of how the different schools of Buddhism were blended in Tan Acharn's particular brand.

In the late afternoon, the bhikkhus, having made themselves tea or coffee, would meet informally, except on the full moon and new moon days when *Pāṭimokkha* was recited. This was a ceremony during which one of the bhikkhus would

recite the 227 rules of the Disciplinary Code at tongue-twisting speed. This most impressive feat took less than an hour. At dusk they all returned to their huts for a further period of meditation, followed by four hours sleep on a straw mat on the floor.

There were no gongs or bells at the Wat, but by keeping alert and receptive it was only a matter of time before we fell in with the monastic routine. I found the evening period of meditation the most difficult. Usually I turned in about nine, but I was uncomfortably aware of the disturbance I was creating in the deep fathomless silence which possessed the Wat at these times. There is a great deal of talk in the Mahāyāna and Zen forms of Buddhism about the void which lies behind the inter-relatedness and non-substantiality of all phenomena; but at that monastery it was a matter of experience. At first the impact was quite alarming as one felt oneself being drawn into that vacuum. Later, when the true nature of 'oneself' had become clearer, one began to hope to share in it.

I think at this point, I should give you my highly simplified version of what Buddhism is all about.

Briefly, it is a method for reaching Enlightenment. In fact, it contains many methods suitable for all types and conditions of people. Enlightenment is a

state of mind based on transcendental wisdom. As it is only something that can be experienced, the mind must be prepared for it. This purification of mind is assisted by progressive knowledge. The Buddha urged all his followers to practise Mindfulness, which is full awareness of the dependent nature of the body, feelings, mind and mental qualities. Only by this method would they come to self-awareness. Once the impermanent, unsatisfactory and unattachable nature of the body and mind becomes known, one is freed from the tyranny of its desires, even though they may still arise. In order to achieve this state of full consciousness or awakening, the whole of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path must be studied and practised, for ethical conduct, mental discipline and the acquiring of wisdom are as essential to each other as the three legs of a tripod.

Three things about Tan Acharn's teaching impressed me as being unusual.

Firstly, he stressed that before one can go on to understand the nature of one's mind, one must first know what constitutes the body. This involves certain exercises which an intellectual type of person might find tedious and distasteful. It is my opinion that unless this foundation is well-laid, the whole edifice is liable to collapse when put to the severe tests with which this path abounds. Because the knowledge that one's body is made up of the same basic material as the rest

of the world reduces one's sense of self-importance, it thus acts as a safety valve. Secondly, he taught the importance of developing the heart position of the mind. This could best be described as the state of mind one adopts when looking at a very non-representational painting – a sort of baffled questioning from the heart. I have found the value of this enormous because it stops the incessant chatter of the mind and allows things to appear in their own right.

Thirdly, he emphatically insisted that: “one need never fear, for the one that knows does not die.” This is bound to cause great antagonism in Buddhist circles because of its implication that man has a soul, the *anattā* or Not-self Doctrine being the cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy. On being questioned, Tan Acharn agreed that the Knower could be called a soul but with this all-important qualification, that when ignorance is finally dispersed the Knower becomes universal i.e. it belongs to no person.

Tan Acharn talked to us many times during the first week. His teaching always took the form of answers to our questions. It is very important one should discover things for oneself, and many times Tan Acharn appeared not to have understood what we meant. But I think that may have been deliberate, for his answers invariably illuminated the motive for asking the question.

After the Kaṭhina ceremony was over and the crowds dispersed, these interviews ceased. The strangeness and unease that I had experienced, in spite of the normality of the atmosphere during the first few days, had worn off. I had been assailed by the sense of my own unworthiness to be there amongst these saintly people. My mind had been thin and jumpy, and the meditation practice would not develop. But now that I had accepted and come to terms with my clumsy ineptitude, I was fully determined to follow Tan Acharn's teaching to the best of my ability. I had been captivated by the modesty, humour, and above all, the wisdom of this gentle, graceful, self-effacing man.

I was disappointed that the daily interviews with Tan Acharn no longer took place, but I was quite unprepared for the shock when a week later I heard that he had been called to Bangkok to minister to a supporter who was dangerously ill. I was told that he hoped to return in ten days time which, I worked out, was the day before I left. This seemed a cruel blow when my time in the Wat was so short. Freda was more fortunate, as she was staying on for a further two weeks.

The meditation practice that evening did nothing to distract my sense of abandonment, and although I fought hard against the waves of self-pity, my heart ached and the tears fell. The temptation to pack my bags and join Ian, who was

stopping in Bangkok in a few days on his way back to England from Australia, was very great indeed.

That night when my aching limbs finally demanded freedom, I groped for my torch, and went out on to the veranda to make myself a lime drink. By the tray, the beam picked out a strange white object like a starfish. I bent and almost snatched up the fragile blossom – it was the beautiful lemon-scented flower of the papaya tree. The bands of sorrow loosened, and the sense of being completely forsaken left me.

I slept well that night, but the next morning when I came to look at the flower, I knew that the laugh was on me, for it was covered with little black ants. I carefully brushed them off out of the window, and then sat down to consider. Instead of thinking in my usual self-centred way what the blossom had meant to me, I let it tell its own story. The papaya tree from which it had come had been chosen and planted by the head nun, Khun Mae Kaew, who was a keen gardener. She had hoed round its roots, and watered it in the dry season, she had cut back the jungle so that the sun could reach it, and having done all she could, she had left it alone to grow and eventually to come into flower.

Flickers of understanding like light began to fill my mind, as I probed deeper and deeper into the meaning of this revelation. When all the ramifications had been

exhausted, I relaxed and decided to take a day off to enjoy this new feeling of hopeful independence with which I had been left.

The following day the meditation practice went better, the climax being when the mind appeared to disengage itself completely from the body in a golden light. The experience was inexpressibly beautiful, and what was strange was that it had an inevitability about it as irresistible as the tide going out.

Tan Acharn came back a day earlier than we expected. We heard the jeep rattle over the wooden bridge, and a few minutes later, after that long journey and without refreshment or rest he was standing by Freda's veranda. As usual he asked for questions, all the while he seemed anxious about our health and how our meditation practice had gone in his absence. He had been driven up by one of his followers, a psychiatrist, who acted as interpreter. Dr. Charoen asked me why I didn't stay longer. But with my new-found strength and sense of freedom, I was certain that for all sorts of reasons, for once not entirely connected with myself, I should leave on the day planned.

I will now record for you Freda's account of her experience at Wat Pa Baan Taad, beginning just after I left for home.

Freda's Experience

It was sometimes said by the Thai disciples at Wat Pa Baan Taad that the Abbot is an Arahant. An Arahant is the fourth and highest class of Buddhist saint – one who has penetrated the full meaning of the Four Noble Truths (which for Buddhists is the dispelling of ignorance), and who is completely free of the evil qualities such as greed, ill-will and conceit, which are known as defilements. He may also in some cases have developed certain unusual powers such as telepathy, but these do not invariably accompany Arahantship.

When I first arrived at the Wat, I was prepared to be indulgent towards the claims of the Abbot's followers that their teacher was an Arahant. It is natural, I thought, for disciples to exalt their religious instructor, and if it helps them in their practice, who am I to question their faith in the Abbot's spiritual eminence? But I noticed that if any questions of supernatural powers came up in his presence – if people asked him to reveal their previous births, for instance – these were firmly put aside by him with the remark that such matters would not help with progress towards the goal.

Our contact with the Abbot at first was fairly remote. Jane and I were instructed to get on with meditation practice; and every now and then, at the end of the day,

we would listen to the Abbot giving a talk on the Dhamma (which is the Buddhist teaching) – which was translated for us by anyone in the audience who could speak both English and Thai. The pillared hall in which we sat was one in which it was easy to move aside for translation sessions. We found the talks, even in translation, most illuminating.

All went fairly smoothly at the beginning. We were able to ask the Abbot questions about meditation practice when we got into difficulties, and I found his rather original style of teaching most refreshing and impressive. The difficulties I went through were emotional and physical problems of adjustment – to the practice, and to the austere (though harmonious and beautiful) conditions of life.

But I gradually found my attitude to the Abbot undergoing a change. My practice was not going at all well, and I did not think that the Abbot was being as helpful as I had felt at first. He had, by this stage of course, had time to learn something of my character, and sum me up. I tried to keep up a dignified front, but I sensed a certain irony in his questions. Sometimes I even felt that he was laughing at me. I hoped that I would be able to take a joke against myself, but the trouble with his laughter was that I could not quite understand where it was aiming: it succeeded, however, in being hurtful.

These 'cheerful' sessions, as I began to call them bitterly, took place now before the evening talks. Actually these occasions should have been delightful. At the beginning of our stay in the Wat, the evening talks had been given to a large and formal gathering. The setting was one of grave beauty. The seventeen or so monks of the establishment would sit along one side of the hall, in the meditation posture, in absolutely unbroken stillness, while the lamplight flickered on the deep bronze colour of their robes. The Abbot himself sat on a slightly raised platform, with perhaps a visiting Abbot or two from another monastery, exchanging talk. We might be waiting for a delayed party of travellers to arrive. The lay visitors, in sarongs and bare-footed, sat round the other three sides of the hall, through whose great columns of teak we looked into the thick jungle, and the stars, and heard the sounds of the oriental night.

But now the greater part of the visitors, who had come for a special ceremony, had left. Jane had unfortunately left too by this time. A few Thai lay meditators remained, and the six nuns were now present, as we gathered round to hear the sermon in the light of small lamps, in a more relaxed and informal atmosphere.

But instead of responding to the friendliness of the group at this stage, I began to withdraw in suspicious hostility. Being in a bad mood, I also began to find that

after a day of struggle with obtruding thoughts and negative emotions during meditation practice, the rather difficult posture which courtesy required us to keep in the Abbot's presence became almost unbearably painful and exhausting.

But the more I withdrew into the shadows between the pools of lamplight, the more the Abbot would single me out for my observations. Whatever I replied appeared to be the subject matter for jokes and laughter, or so it seemed, with my slight knowledge of Thai. And furthermore, the Abbot would fill out the time before his talk with innumerable stories of tigers. "Have I come all this way, to sit here with breaking back and knees on fire, simply in order to listen to this peasant gossip?" I would mutter to myself during this period, in helpless fury.

The Thais sensed that I was being given a grilling, and they were particularly kind during the odd occasions we would bump into each other by day, though generally we did not speak to each other as we were all, more or less, on meditation practice. (I say more or less, because some of them did not observe great rigorousness in this; but others did). One day however, a young Thai woman began to speak to me about Buddhism, and I found it a relief to open my heart to someone. We got round, as so often happens in a Buddhist country, to the question of Arahants, and as I felt tempted to voice some of my hard feelings

about the Abbot, I said cautiously that I wondered sometimes if the Abbot could be an Arahant. Of course I greatly respected his ability as a teacher, but surely I had read in the holy texts that the 'Arahant's smile' was something of rare occurrence – yet this monk seemed to spend so much of his time laughing. She replied gently that he was regarded by many as an Arahant, though of course I might be correct. Then she went off into the forest glades, only to return twenty minutes later to say that she had been thinking of a story which she would like to tell me if she might. I said I would be enchanted, and she said that she was about to tell a story to illustrate a 'habit' – a *wasana*, as she called it.

She then told the tale of a rich man who learned that an Arahant was coming to visit his neighbourhood. He decided that he would invite the holy man to a meal, and also that he would like to present him with three sets of robes. When the day came, he set out to meet the Arahant and conduct him to his home. As he was walking back along a muddy track with the monk, they came to a large puddle; whereupon, instead of walking sedately round it, the monk tucked up his robes and jumped over it. The rich man was shocked by this, and thought to himself "This undignified fellow cannot be an Arahant. I think I will give him only two sets of robes." After a while they came to another puddle, and again the monk

jumped over it; and the rich man thought “No, he is certainly a common fellow – I will give him only one set of robes.” Then a third time they came to a puddle, and this time instead of leaping over it, the monk walked carefully round it. The rich man was puzzled, and said to the monk, “Venerable Sir, can you explain to me please, why it is that you jumped over the first two puddles, and then walked round the third?” And the monk replied “Sir, I did not think it would be good for you to withdraw the third set of robes.”

At the end of the story, the Thai said, in the gentle deprecating way they have, that she only told it to illustrate a ‘*wasana*’, a habit: that perhaps the monk had been an athlete in a previous life, or something of that sort. But I replied that I thought it demonstrated the rashness of rich men in making up their minds about the qualities of Arahants; and we both laughed.

In fact, as it turned out, the Abbot’s laughter at my expense had more calculation in it than I had understood at first. The basic fact was that my meditation practice had taken a wrong turn. But the cul-de-sac into which I was heading had at first seemed so spectacular, and so satisfying to my pride, that I would certainly have ignored straightforward instruction on this point. Or rather, I would have accepted it superficially. I knew in fact, because it is set out quite plainly in all

the books, that where I was going at this stage was wrong. But unconsciously I revelled in it, and when the phase deteriorated, all my effort was really, though not admittedly, bent on recalling it. My troubles were by no means over when I heard the story of the jumping Arahant – in fact they increased during the following week, until they reached the stage of a showdown. I felt unable to bear any longer the public humiliation to which I was being subjected, and I asked permission to leave the Wat.

This was the turning point. I was in a highly emotional state. I did not like to commit the discourtesy of stating publicly how much I disliked and disapproved of the Abbot and his behaviour. I was, after all, his guest; and he was in the midst of a set of people every one of whom I liked and admired. It was very likely that they were all brain-washed I thought acidly, but I could not deny their good qualities. All the same, I did not see why I should crawl away in apparent defeat.

But the interview with the Abbot was so handled that I did not leave the Wat. I left his presence, having not achieved what I had intended at all. I walked along a forest track, ready to explode with frustration. But gradually the emotional tension had its effect. I had been directed, I knew, to look at the state of my mind. Suddenly I looked at it, and saw – hatred, contempt, and anger. I could not imagine how the

usual civilised controls had been knocked aside so easily as to reduce me to this condition, but there I was. I realised that, whatever the interest and fascination of my meditation practice might be, the mind which I was supposedly training was as full of defilements as ever. It happened quite suddenly at this stage that I could understand and accept the direction that was being given to me about the meditation as well.

By the last day of my stay in the Wat, when we foregathered for the evening address, I was in a very different mood from that of previous occasions. I looked across from where we sat towards the Abbot, and wondered how my heart could have borne such grudging resentment towards this skilled teacher and kindly man. At that point, he looked benignly in my direction and asked if I had anything to say. Since it was my last evening, I had expected to be asked to make some comment. I had spent the afternoon with a Thai friend from Bangkok, who had come up for the weekend to very kindly accompany me back on the journey from the jungle. We had spent the whole afternoon discussing points of doctrine, and working out with some care three questions which I wanted to ask about the teaching, which differed in some respects from the Buddhism which I had previously learnt in the West. This Thai friend replied on my behalf that I had

some questions, and she was about to ask them, when I interrupted her and said that it would be better to hear the Abbot's sermon first and ask questions afterwards. Then, to please the little group of lay people among whom I sat, and knowing their fancies, I whispered to them that I would ask the questions during the sermon in my heart. Since I was feeling very warmly towards everyone that evening, I also condescendingly decided that, however the address developed I would tell the lay people later that my doubts had been more or less satisfied. The Abbot looked at me again, humorously, and said slowly in English, of which he had learned a little, "If anyone thinks that I answer their questions, don't be too sure, don't be too sure." I felt that he was amiably sharing the joke, and we composed ourselves to listen.

The Abbot went into his customary brief period of meditation before speaking. As the sermon developed I noticed that my Thai friend – who had previously visited the Wat only a couple of times, and who had not practised under the Abbot – was growing noticeably paler. When The Abbot finished, she translated the talk into English (she had been an official translator for UNESCO and she knew her job). When she finished, we both looked at each other in utter amazement. The

whole talk had been divided into three parts, each woven around one of my three questions, which were all answered in great detail.

I felt overcome, I must confess, and there was quite a stir amongst the Thai laity, because my UNESCO friend whispered to them the Abbot had read my thoughts. The Abbot sat silently for a space of time – then he looked towards the group of lay people and said firmly and slowly in English, “I do not read people’s thoughts. That is foolish talk. I just give talks on Dhamma.”

Acknowledgments

Books come together with the engagement and enthusiasm of many people. This present volume could not have been produced without the proactive and committed contribution of Ajaan Dick Sīlaratano, one of the senior Western monks who trained with Ajaan Mahā Boowa and who now leads Forest Dhamma Monastery, in Virginia, USA. He practised together with both of the authors of this book, Ajaan Paññāvaddho and Jane Browne, and it was through his personal encouragement and advocacy that these precious letters have been preserved and reproduced here, and can thus be made available as a resource of wisdom for the world at large. Great gratitude is thus extended to him as without his contributions these letters would never have seen the light of day in the form of this book.

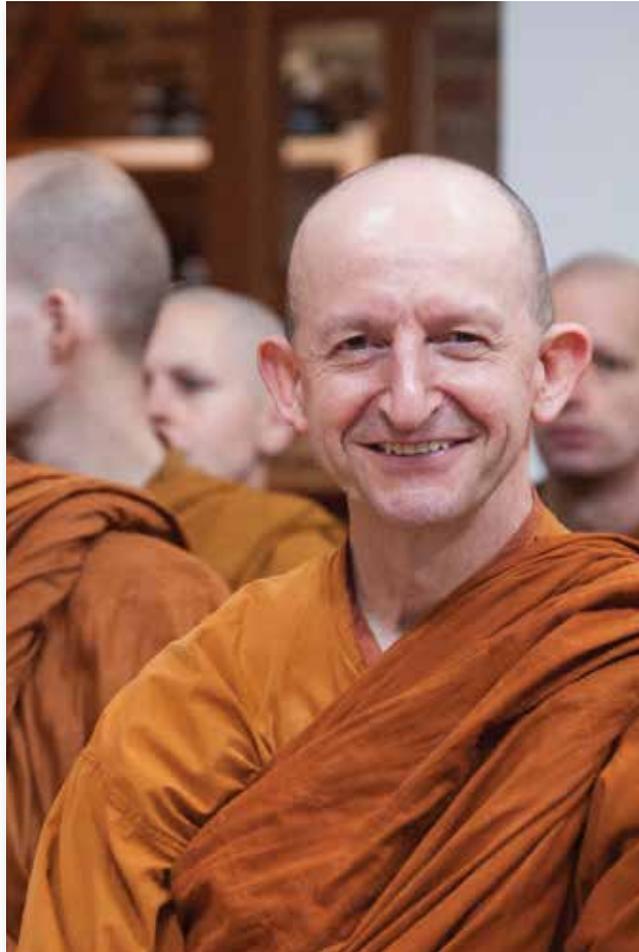
In addition, the steady encouragement of George Sharp, and his persistent efforts to assist with the publication of these letters, gave Jane Browne the necessary support she needed to complete the task of editing and writing her commentaries, whilst burdened with increasing infirmities and old age. Even though Jane passed away before this book could be printed, she was able

to put her seal of approval upon the manuscript in the form it appears here as well as upon the ideas for the design.

Lastly, great gratitude is also due to Nick Halliday as the designer and typesetter, who spent many many hours applying his extensive and comprehensive skills to the task of crafting the letters and commentaries into the form the reader finds them here.

To these people who were at the centre of the production of this book, as well as the many others who assisted with typing and proofreading, and the many other attendant details, we express our heartfelt '*Anumodanā!*'

Ajahn Amaro



The Final Word

In its essence this book is not so much about intrepid women or adventurous travels, or even a hermit's life in remote, exotic places; rather its unique value is the insight it gives the reader a into a deep and rare spiritual friendship. It's an age-old spiritual dynamic – that of the eager enquirer and the sage in the forest – and the great wealth of Dhamma teaching from Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho, spelled out here in all its richness, embodies the power such dialogues have to bring forth a wisdom that can benefit us all.

We should thus be grateful that Acharn Paññāvaḍḍho, a deeply respected Dhamma teacher in the Forest tradition, possessed that extraordinary wisdom that can be shared here, and that Jane, his indefatigable enquirer, should have had the faith and fortitude to call it forth so abundantly.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ajahn Amaro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Glossary

- Ācariya*** Teacher; sometimes also a term of respect for a senior monk.
- Akusala*** Bad, demerit, unskillful.
- Ānāpānasati*** Mindfulness of breathing in and out. One of the best known forms of meditation practice.
- Anattā*** That the animistic idea and attitude which people and beings attribute to themselves and others, which gives rise to the firmly held belief that there is a presiding self-entity in the five *khandhas* is, in fact, a convenient fiction and truly speaking quite false.
- Arahant*** One who is worthy, one who attains the ultimate state of Nibbāna.
- Bhikkhu*** A Buddhist monk; one who lives on donated food.

- Citta** The Heart. The *citta* has often been translated as the ‘mind’ or the ‘mental factors’ because it is said that the four *khandhas* of *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* are the *citta*. Although there is some truth in this, it must be realised that these are by way of being ‘modifications of the *citta*.’ The *citta* in its true unmodified state is beyond the *khandhas* and it has no signs by which it may be known in the sensory universe. The *citta* is translated as ‘heart’ because the experience of those who are skilled in meditation is that the incoming sensations appear to ‘gravitate’ to the heart; and it appears that it is from here that the above four modifications of the *citta* spring forth. It is well to avoid the present trend of thinking that the mind is just the thinking apparatus (which is *saṅkhāra khandha*) and located in the head (brain).
- Deva** An angel like being of the *deva*-realms which are immediately above the human realm.
- Dukkha** Discontent, suffering.
- Kamma** Lit: ‘action.’ But in Buddhism it means action of the body, speech or mind, which has a moral content of good, bad or neutral. Such action brings back a corresponding result.

<i>Kammaṭṭhāna</i>	Lit: ‘basis of action’; the meditation object that leads one to gain skill in <i>samādhi</i> or in wisdom; the term used to identify the Thai forest tradition founded by Venerable Ācariya Mun.
<i>Kilesa</i>	Mental defilements. These are what soil, stain, or defile the heart making it impure or dirty. The usual list includes: greed, hatred, dullness and stupidity, conceit, arrogance, uncertainty, mental torpor, restlessness, no sense of shame in doing wrong, no sense of fear of the consequences of doing wrong.
<i>Māra</i>	The evil one; the personification of evil and temptation.
<i>Mettā</i>	Friendliness; pure love.
<i>Nibbāna</i>	The ultimate goal of Buddhist training. Lit: ‘Extinguished.’
<i>Nimitta</i>	A sign. In meditation practice, a mental image which is usually visual.
<i>Paññā</i>	Wisdom.

- Samādhi*** Meditative calm; absorbed concentration, having many levels and types.
- Samatha*** Calm.
- Sīla*** Morality; moral virtue; the five moral precepts. But it also has a wider connotation in its higher and more subtle levels, for it includes all bodily action and speech, which are assessed as right or wrong, depending on whether they make one's heart less or more passionate. It can also be described as 'that which sets a limit to one's unruly behaviour.'
- Sotāpanna*** One who has entered the stream leading to Nibbāna. The first of the four stages culminating in Nibbāna.
- Sutta*** The discourses of the Buddha.
- Vipassanā*** Meditative insight that is deep and effective in eliminating the defilements; insight that arises based on *samādhi*, and not just an intellectual exercise.



Dear Jane...

BHIKKHU PAÑÑĀVAÐÐHO & JANE BROWNE

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6th Sept, 1962

Dear James
Sorry I have not written for a long time after your letter, but I have been spending most of my time translating some booklets on meditation, which Philip Buddy will refer to in course of time.

With regard to my T.B. foot, it seems to be going alright now. The last 4 days, 8 weeks ago, I found that I (was of course) had all killed in, and it's now just a thin Web until after the rains are finished (the middle for we are not allowed to climb in the mountains during the rains). I was glad to have some practice in the house for some practice.

2nd April 1966

Wang Pa-bam Road
Bum Thud Village
District of Moan
Upper Thame
Yunnan

Dear James

Thanks for your two received the first volume of the book which I have written to arrive in the country in the summer never more for accordance with what I have said in the address now with and permit so that you can do it all off I have also written a third volume of the book which I have asked to be written to be rather than the first volume. I have also written to be rather than the first volume.

Dear James, Thanks for your letter which I have received. I have also written a third volume of the book which I have asked to be written to be rather than the first volume.

Dear James

17th May 1964
I am very glad of you to ask James to see me in London for treatment of my foot, but I really very good. I suppose it is my good luck that I have been here for some time and I shall return to the house in 3 weeks, but I shall be able to do a 10 day course of treatment. I have been here for some time and I shall return to the house in 3 weeks, but I shall be able to do a 10 day course of treatment.

March 1964



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U.S. AIR MAIL

James Browne
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BY AIR MAIL
AEROPROGRAMME

17 FEB 1965



Mrs Ian Browne
Crabwood Farm House
Crabwood
Winchester
HANTS
ENGLAND

try and describe it in a few words. I have been thinking about it a great deal for the last few days. I have been thinking about it a great deal for the last few days. I have been thinking about it a great deal for the last few days.

To see it as it is, in a simple and not grand way, is to see it as it is, in a simple and not grand way, is to see it as it is, in a simple and not grand way.

Phan P...

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