

Journey Towards The Deathless

By Khema Bhikkhu

"And which seven are the conditions that lead to no decline?"

[1] "As long as the monks meet often, meet a great deal, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

[2] "As long as the monks meet in harmony, adjourn from their meetings in harmony, and conduct Sangha business in harmony, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

[3] "As long as the monks neither decree what has been undecreed nor repeal what has been decreed, but practice undertaking the training rules as they have been decreed, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

[4] "As long as the monks honor, respect, venerate, and do homage to the elder monks — those with seniority who have long been ordained, the fathers of the Sangha, leaders of the Sangha — regarding them as worth listening to, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

[5] "As long as the monks do not submit to the power of any arisen craving that leads to further becoming, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

[6] "As long as the monks see their own benefit in wilderness dwellings, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

[7] "As long as the monks each keep firmly in mind: 'If there are any well-behaved fellow followers of the chaste life who have yet to come, may they come; and may the well-behaved fellow-followers of the chaste life who have come live in comfort,' their growth can be expected, not their decline."

"As long as the monks remain steadfast in these seven conditions, and as long as these seven conditions endure among the monks, the monks' growth can be expected, not their decline."

- AN 7.21

A journey of 30 days
begins with Mudita driving towards the planes,
with mudita for all the goodness at the 3 Refuges,
with kataññu for being offered such an opportunity
to connect with my tradition,
passed down

from Luang Por V,
from Luang Por Sumedho,
from Luang Por Chah,
from Luang Por Mun,
from all the monastic disciples of the past and present,
from the
Buddha.

With the generous support of all the lay supporters of the past and present,

A tradition of reality,
of peace.
A tradition
of freedom.

A journey of 30 days
with 3 companions in the holy life.
Harmony, joy and humour was the theme
of the red eye east.
Landed in England to the sight of a new friend
in ochre robes
welcoming us.

On to a mini bus.
On to the solitude of the heart,
Wat Pah Cittaviveka.

Welcomed by our brothers and sisters in the Dhamma,
by Ajahn Sucitto,
by the beauty and tranquility of that Dhamma land.

30 minute walk through Chitthurst forest
to my abiding for the next 10 days.
A small a-frame on the top of an old fort,
just big enough to put my bag down
and stretch out this body on a small mat.

Chitthurst forest,
a forest of ancient trees,
some thousands of years old,
a large pond inhabited by my northern feathered friends,
Canadian Geese and their newly hatched goslings,
Deer fly, black fly, tick and mosquito free.

*Surmounting all, knowing all,
The wise-one, unsoiled in all,
Is well-released renouncing all
When craving is outworn.
That man I would fain make known
As "One-who-dwells-all-alone."
— S 99 282*

“is this a deva loka?”
10 days of bhavana at the root of trees,
of peaceful forest wanderings,
of the joy of solitude.

Wat Pah Cittaviveka,
a truly warm, friendly and harmonious Sangha.
Many stories shared of the early days in the derelict mansion,
of Luang Por V and the other pioneers.

Found ways to offer some skills learned at Tisarana
repairing generators and lawn mowers,

helped prepare for a large event,
celebrating Vesākha Pūjā,

participated in a never ending rice pindapat,
heard beautiful recollections on the life of the Buddha
read by Ajahn Karuniko,
heard some of the inspiring reflections of Ajahn Sucitto
on monastic training, on samadhi, on liberating wisdom.

Explored
 the magical
 the mysterious
 the utter confusing
kutis built by
 the magical
 the mysterious
 Ajahn Thitadhammo

[without help it may take minutes or hours...or days...to just figure out where the
front door is located and then begins the ape-like attempts to open the door, full of pushing kicking and
pulling on various things.]

A brief conversation with Ajahn Thitadhammo
where he reflected on the deep teachings
accessible to us through attending to the simplicity of nature,
pointing towards the Dhamma that is manifesting
through trees, birds, the sun and rain,

and exclaiming in pure joy

“there’s nothing there”

Pindapat to nearby Midhurst with Ajahn Cunda and another Bhikkhu.
1 hour journey through farmland, polo fields and forests,
and 1 hour seeking alms.
So much joy seemed to manifest

*Blissful is solitude
for one who's content,
 who has heard the Dhamma,
 who sees.
Blissful is non-affliction
with regard for the world,
 restraint for living beings.
Blissful is dispassion
with regard for the world,
 the overcoming of sensuality.
But the subduing of the conceit "I am" —
 That is truly
 the ultimate bliss.
- Ud 21*

*It's hard to see the unaffected,
For the truth is not easily seen.
Craving is pierced
 in one who knows; For one who sees,
There is nothing.
- Ud 8.2*

for that 1 hour,
for both the givers and receivers.

Pindapat #2

a 5 hour journey
passing over rolling green fields
filled with hundreds of sheep.

Such beauty in the English country side!
Such expansive landscapes easily quiet the mind.

Next off to the Deathless Realm.

Once arrived
we crowded into Luang Por Sumedhos meeting room
inside his kuti.

About 30 monks, novices and anagarikas
seated under Luang Por,
paying respects,
making offerings,
and hearing Luang Por reflect on the practicality of the Buddhas
teachings
and express his intention for the upcoming retreat.

He said he will offer encouragements to awaken.

I always experience his presence as an ocean of stillness.

1 week of “hearing the Dhamma frequently taught”
by Luang Por, various elders and Siladara,
truly “venerated seekers of the truth.”

What a gift
to experience such immense blessings of the world.

Luang Por Sumedho frequently pointed
towards the transient, unsatisfactory
and empty nature of all phenomenon

Sabbe Sankhara Anicca
Sabbe Sankhara Dukkha
Sabbe Dhamma Anatta

He expounded on the four noble truths
and explained how to practically apply this teaching
to each moment.

He encouraged us all to awaken from identification
with our conditioning,
to trust the knowing
and transcend Dukkha.

Such powerful and direct teachings!
Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu, anuumodāmi!

Next up ...
1 week

I started to reflect on the time when I was walking near my mother's home in Ottawa and suddenly saw a dozen pigeons sitting on a telephone line. The sky that day was very clear, very sunny, and very blue. The pigeons were all puffed up to stay warm—it's quite clever the way birds do that. So there was this lovely image of a row of puffy pigeons perched against this deep blue background. Ah! It was one of those moments when a sense of wonder arises. The mind stops, and there's just this. There's only the way things are, just as they are in that moment, without any analysis or mental comment. I like to think of this as "connection."
-Luang Por Viradhammo, *The Contemplatives Craft*

As long as we do not allow things to cease, we just create new kamma that just reinforces our habits. When something arises, we grasp it and proliferate around it; and this complicates everything. Then these things will be repeated and repeated throughout our lives – we cannot go around following our desires and fears and expect to realize peace. We contemplate fear and desire so that these do not delude us anymore: we have to know what is deluding us before we can let it go. Desire and fear are to be known as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. They are seen and penetrated so that suffering can burn itself away.
- Luang Por Sumedho, *The Four Noble Truths*

of some of the most beautiful beings on the planet
abiding together
in harmony
in the Deathless Realm.
The IEM (International Elders Meeting).

1 week of group discussions
centered around monastic training,
and other topics more relevant to the abbots
and those more senior.

1 week of service,
of contemplation,
of teachings
and connection.

Many meetings and conversing on the Dhammo
with the sea of white/the bleach boys/the anagarikas,
the sāmaṇeras and junior bhikkhus,
with those venerated and esteemed elders of our lineage.
Timidly paying respects and making introductions
to those long gone forth
only to be showered in warmth, kindness
and friendly affection.
Brothers in the holy life.

Spent multiple evenings
with Luang Por Liem
as he encouraged those newly ordained,
reflected on his early struggles
and on life with Luang Por Chah.
Stressing over and over
the importance of
restraint,
of the dangers of desire and attachment,
of cultivating
dispassion towards the body
and sense pleasures,
towards acquisitions and worldly pursuits,
towards all mental phenomenon.
To cultivate a secure and stable refuge
that's not dependent on the worldly winds
of praise and blame
gain and loss
pleasure and pain
fame and disrepute

How inspiring to be in the presence
of one so

*“Thus, when associating with people of integrity is made full, it fills [the conditions for] hearing the true Dhamma. When hearing the true Dhamma is made full, it fills [the conditions for] conviction. When conviction is made full, it fills [the conditions for] appropriate attention. When appropriate attention is made full, it fills [the conditions for] mindfulness & alertness. When mindfulness & alertness are made full, they fill [the conditions for] restraint of the senses. When restraint of the senses is made full, it fills [the conditions for] the three forms of right conduct. When the three forms of right conduct are made full, it fills [the conditions for] the four establishings of mindfulness. When the four establishings of mindfulness are made full, it fills [the conditions for] the seven factors for awakening. When the seven factors for awakening are made full, they fill [the conditions for] clear knowing & release. Such is the food for this clear knowing & release, and thus are they made full.
- AN 10.61*

We need to know how to go against the stream, have mindfulness and clear comprehension, not to be fooled by the world, not to be misled by moods such as praise, blame, gain and loss. We shouldn't feel obliged to go along with everything, but have a sense of self-discipline, being able to tame our minds (dama). If we get what we wish, we get what we wish, It's just that. If we don't get what we wish, so be it. We need to know how to put things down, how to abandon them.

*This should be sufficient to create the feeling of being one's own refuge, of not being fooled by the world or by moods. Be somebody who conducts himself with samadhi – with a mind standing firm, mind-objects standing firm – not being overpowered and lost.
- Luang Por Liem, The Ways of the Peaceful*

free.

30 days of so much goodness,
clearly made possible through the tireless
support, generosity and kindness
of countless lay supporters.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu, anuumodāmi!

And through the hard work and organization
of the local sangha,
working together
to manifest profoundly fertile conditions
for the growth and development
in the Dhamma
of so many.

sādhu, sādhu, sādhu, anuumodāmi!

And then the fall,
the dissolution,
the departures.
Sabbe sankhara anicca.

“Goodbye England”,
25 hours in transit,
5, 339 kilometers
and the return
to the Three Refuges.
Full of joy.
Full of gratitude.

Full of jet lag.