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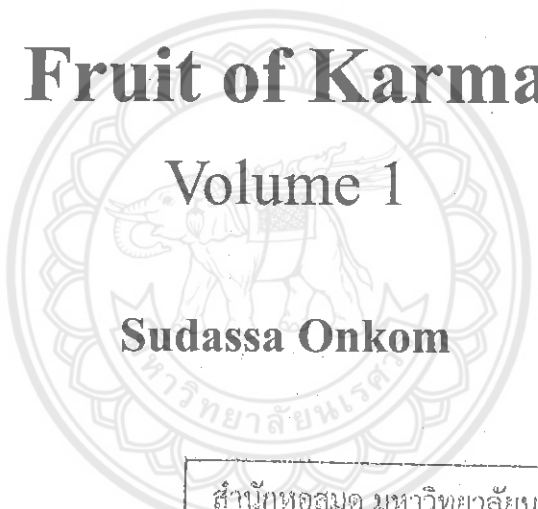


สำนักหอสมุด

Fruit of Karma

Volume 1

Sudassa Onkom



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Preface

This book is a translation of the Thai edition *Sat Lok Yom Pen Pai Tam Kam* (*All sentient beings are dependent on their Karma*), which was compiled from a series of articles that were written for the Thai Women's Magazine *Kulastri*. The first twenty chapters of the Thai edition were translated and published in 1994 under the title **Fruit of Karma** by *Sudassa Onkom*, Dr. Suchitra Onkom's pen name.

In 1997 the twenty chapters of *Fruit of Karma* and an additional newly translated twenty chapters, taken from the Thai edition, were published under the title *Views Through a Temple Window*. This combined edition was completed with the help of Dr. Suchitra's good friend Bruce Evans, who not only revised her translation but also suggested changing the title and shifting the emphasis of the book from a strictly religious to a broader sociological one.

The present edition is a revision that includes the forty chapters that were published in 1997, but using the title of 1994 English edition. Dr. Suchitra decided to use *Fruit of Karma* since it is more widely known by former readers and, thus, by new seekers of the expanded edition.

The remaining forty chapters of the Thai edition are in the process of being translated and it is hoped that they will be available to the public soon.

Assistant Professor Donald W. Sandage
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Foreword

When Dr. Suchitra first showed me her manuscript, based on actual events at a Buddhist Monastery, I found it a fascinating story, showing how a constant stream of men and women of modern Thailand would come to the monastery with their tangled lives of struggle and hope, to have their confusion dissolved in the clarity of the abbot's understanding. The novel made it clear that even the fast-paced life of today's Thailand finds its counterpoint and balance in the tranquillity of the forest monasteries, which still form the heart of Thai culture. The ambitions of even these twentieth-century business people, the longings and fears of the belles of Bangkok, the schemes and uncertainties of millionaires and generals, all sought and found their answers within the ancient truths of Buddhism as revealed by the abbot Ven. Phra Khru Charoen. Also as I read, the outlines of the practice of Buddhist vipassanā meditation became clear, skilfully woven into this tale of daily events in the abbot's busy life.

Though the picture thus drawn of Ven. Phra Khru Charoen's wisdom and power was most impressive, I was nonetheless unprepared for the impact of meeting the man himself. In 1992 I visited Thailand for a one-week vipassanā retreat. Arriving at Ambhavan Monastery, I was swept into a world at once serene and alive with purpose, a place where graceful temples stood in repose among groves of swaying palms and mango trees, and white-clad meditators moved in introspection along wide, well-shaded walkways lined with flowering trees. Ambhavan's tranquillity, as I soon learned, was as much a reflection of its abbot's personality as was the intensity with which the monks, nuns and lay devotees pursued the rigorous programme of meditation. It was a delightful place in which to stay, and to meditate.

But to sit in the presence of the abbot himself was a rare and precious opportunity. Sometimes sternly reproving his disciples, sometimes bantering lightly with them, what remained constant throughout was the immediacy of his attention. His words seemed to issue forth

from a fathomless well of certainty. And when he spoke to me, whom he had never seen before, it was startling, not to mention embarrassing, to hear my inmost thoughts, feelings and personal history described with unerring accuracy. Now I understood what moved Dr. Suchitra to transform the records of the abbot's years of daily teaching to his numerous followers into the form of a novel which would simultaneously entertain the readers, inspire them with admiration for this master's wisdom, and offer a guide to the method of meditation by which one could achieve this very wisdom oneself.

The story does not end here with this book. Dr. Suchitra is busily writing further volumes, drawn from the eighteen years that Ven. Phra Khru Charoen has been teaching vipassanā meditation and solving disciples' problems. Later volumes also have much more to explain about vipassanā meditation. But in the present work, the readers will find both a practical guide to the fundamental procedure of meditation, and a delightful tale of ambitions and anger, of fervent hopes and frustrated dreams, reaching fulfilment in the still pool of understanding.

Richard Guard

Introduction

Fruit of Karma is a translation of my novel entitled *All sentient beings are dependent on their Karma* which comes from Buddha Vacana "Kammunā vattatī loko." This novel was written in Thai under my pen name "Sudassa Onkom" and has been published chapter by chapter in a bi-weekly magazine named Kulastri since 1987.

The inspiration for my translation comes from my good friend Mr. Richard Guard, who has much faith in Buddhism. Having read only five chapters of the manuscript, he then suggested that the whole story should be translated into English, since the Buddhist population has increased more and more throughout the world.

All events described in this novel are true. Some of them were recounted by my vipassanā teacher, Ven. Phra khru Jarun Thitadhammo, currently known as Ven. Chao Khun Phra Rājsuddhiñāṇamaṅgala of Ambhavan Monastery, Singh Buri. The rest I witnessed myself.

As a writer, I am very happy whenever I receive letters from readers enumerating the benefits they have gained from my novel. Some confess that they used to violate all the Five Precepts but say that having read this story they now intend to observe the 'Pañca-Sīla' for the rest of their life. Some report that they have gone to Ambhavan Monastery to practise vipassanā meditation, and they thank me for having shown the way.

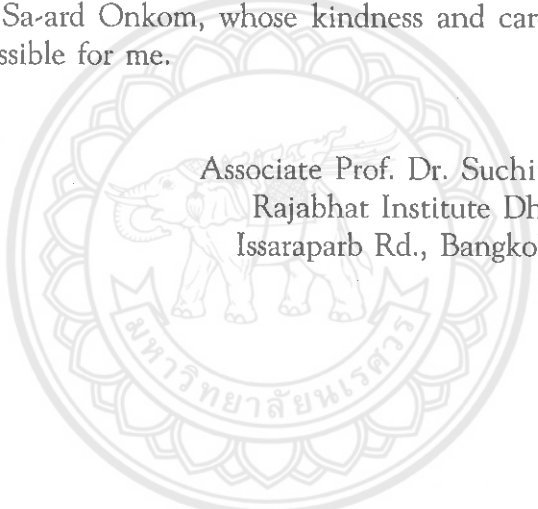
It is because of the loving-kindness and wisdom of my esteemed teacher Ven. Chao Khun Phra Rājsuddhiñāṇamaṅgala that this book has been written. He not only provided the material on which the novel is based but he also acts as a constant inspiration to me. I wish to offer him my deepest gratitude and my heartfelt thanks.

Ven. Chao Khun Phra Dhammapidok (P.A. Payutto) of Ñāṇavesakavana Monastery taught me much about Buddhism from his vast treasure of learning. To him I sincerely express my respectful

thanks. To Ven. Kemanando (Bang Simplee), Who first introduced me to Richard Guard, and thus set in motion the process that led to this publication, and to Associate Prof. Dr. Sunthorn Na-Rangsi, from whom I gained my knowledge in Buddhism, I take this opportunity to express my gratitude.

My good friend Richard Guard and Assistant Prof. Anchalee Chayanuvat inspired me to translate this book, and I wish to thank them for this and for their time and care in editing the English.

And last, but not late, I wish to thank my parents, Mr.Srist and Madame Sa-ard Onkom, whose kindness and care have made everything possible for me.



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Chapter 1

The Venerable Phra Khru Charoen followed a daily routine of rising at 4 a.m., practicing vipassana (insight) meditation until 6 a.m., and then going out for alms, to allow people living nearby the chance to make merit by giving. He considered vipassana meditation to be the foremost duty in a Buddhist monk's daily life. Every monk and novice staying at Wat Ambhavan had to practice vipassana every day to reduce mental defilement, and also to teach the practice to people in the community, for the benefit of both.

As the Abbot, the Phra Khru frequently reminded his monks in residence, "According to the Buddha, every monk has three duties: to study, practice and teach the Dhamma. Whoever neglects these duties discredits the monkhood, and is censurable for being lazy. People lose their faith in this kind of monk."

"Monks who act as fortune-tellers for lotteries and as magicians are not fulfilling their duties, are they?" one of the new monks asked.

"I do not consider such persons monks. I call them 'those who earn their livelihood by priest craft.' Nowadays, people make their living by such means. They are not afraid of evil."

"Perhaps they do not believe that evil exists?"

"Some of them believe, but commit evil anyway. I don't like to talk about the high-ranking monks who have the status of Chao khun, but behind people's backs they ...no, I don't want to talk about such cases. It may harm good monks, of whom there are many," the Abbot said with resignation.

"Luang Poh, I have heard that some great Chao Khuns trade in opium. Is this true?" asked the young monk, addressing his superior in the traditional way as Luang Poh, "holy father."

"Don't think so much about it," the Abbot replied. "It is better to concentrate on practicing meditation. There are many things that it is not safe for us to know. You must accept that if someone is a bad monk or nun, that is their own business. The Buddha taught that all creatures are dependent on their karma. As you sow, so shall you reap. Whatever kind of seed you plant, you will receive that kind of fruit. This is the truth."

"Yes, sir. It is good we are staying in this monastery," the new monk said joyfully.

"I do not accept monks who merely shave their heads and wear the saffron robe, yet do not follow the monks' three duties. Whoever comes here but does not practice vipassana meditation is asked to move to another monastery. What I want is quality, not quantity. Those who have the title of monk must be truly of good conduct, and fit to be called 'sons of the Buddha,'" the Phra Khru said solemnly.

The strict vipassana meditation of the monks in this monastery had for a long time been well known throughout Thailand. From every part of the country, monks and lay people came in search of tranquillity to this place which the Abbot had transformed into a vipassana meditation school and which had been famous ever since. More and more monks' quarters (*kuti*) had been built, yet still there were not enough to accommodate the many people who came in search of liberation. These people did not care about their living conditions, however. They were intent on achieving mental peace and were content to stay in the courtyard, no matter what the weather.

One morning at the beginning of October 1973, after practicing vipassana meditation, the Phra Khru was preparing to go out on his alms round, followed by a young lay attendant holding a tiffin carrier. As the Abbot, black alms-bowl in his arms, was about to leave the monastery gate, he saw a man about thirty years old, squatting and carrying a small bag on his right shoulder. With hands folded in reverence, the man said excitedly, "You ... you are Venerable Phra Khru Charoen, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan, aren't you?" His accent was strange, indicating that he was not from anywhere nearby.

"I am," the Abbot replied. "You do not live around here, do you?" The man seemed both delighted and amazed by this response. He answered, "No, sir. I come from Kalasin Province."

"Do you have something to ask of me?"

"Yes, sir, something very important. But it ... it is a secret," he stammered, glancing at the lay attendant.

"Now then, I understand. But is your secret so urgent that you must

had a serious quarrel, and my father beat my mother. She couldn't bear it, so she killed him." He stopped speaking, for the incident was still as clear in his mind as if it had just happened, although it had occurred ten years before.

"So your mother went to prison, did she?" asked the Abbot.

"Yes, sir. She was convicted of premeditated murder. The court sentenced her to twenty years, but they reduced her sentence by half because she had confessed, and in the year 1963 it was reduced again, for the King's third-cycle birthday."

"If you are Thai, you should know the right way of saying that. It should be, 'On the occasion of the thirty-sixth birthday of His Majesty the King,'" the Phra Khru interrupted. Buahyao quickly excused himself, saying, "I only finished the fourth grade. I cannot speak properly, but I am Thai."

"All right, all right. Go on then."

"Yes, sir. My mother was in jail for five years. After that she came back and worked in the slaughterhouse. We lived together until I was twenty-five, and then the miracle happened. You won't believe it," the man stopped speaking and glanced at the Abbot's face as if watching for his reaction.

"Go on. I will tell you later whether I believe it or not," said the Phra Khru in an even tone, and the man continued his story.

"I had a strange dream, three nights running. It happened while I was half asleep and half awake. In the dream I saw a flash of light, and then I saw you and the monastery. The image in the dream was so clear that I was able to recognize everything. After that, a loud and powerful voice spoke, I did not know whose. It seemed to be coming out of thin air. The voice told me, 'Buahyao, the image you have seen is Wat Ambhavan, and that monk is named Venerable Phra Khru Charoen; he is the Abbot. Go and ask him to be your preceptor. This monastery is situated in the west; it will take you fifteen days of walking to reach it. You can purify your mind at this monastery.' Then both the image and the voice disappeared. I was startled, and I woke up. It was time for work.

"I took no notice of the dream at first. I thought, 'The more a man eats, the more he dreams.' But when I had the same dream the next night and again the night after that, I told my mother. She advised me to do as the dream said. I told the owner of the slaughterhouse that I wanted to leave, but he wouldn't let me go because he couldn't find anyone to take over my work. I didn't know what to do, and I waited for one more year. I got a chance when my mother married again. Her husband took over my work

so that I could come, sir ... " The man stopped speaking.

"How old is your mother?" asked the Phra Khru.

"About forty-five, sir."

"Oh, a woman of this age can get married again," the Abbot spoke with a smile.

"Yes, sir, and my step-father is about two years older than I am."

"You mean your mother has married a man the same age as her son?"

"Yes, sir, but he is a good man. He is very diligent, and he does not get drunk," Buahyao said, as if the goodness of his step-father would reduce his mother's social transgression. People thought that marrying a person the same age as one's son or daughter was wrong, or at least abnormal.

The Phra Khru believed everything the man had told him, but to be sure, he had to test it. He entered the state of concentration and mentally recited, "perceiving." Then he knew that the man was telling the truth, except in one thing: he was Vietnamese, not Thai. The Abbot knew why the man had to lie, and also that he was a person capable of telling lies because he had a coarse mind. But if he practiced vipassana meditation and made his mind more refined, he would develop shame and moral fear and refrain from evil in action, word, and thought.

"I don't understand why that voice told me to purify my mind here at this monastery. What do I have to purify when I have never done any evil?" the man said in his ignorance, not knowing what was good and bad. Growing up in a slaughterhouse and seeing animals killed every day had hardened him.

"Try to answer this. If there is no cause, how could an effect appear?" the Abbot asked, testing the man's mental faculties. Buahyao sat still and thought for about ten minutes, but he was unable to understand. He declared: "I really never have done any evil, sir, not at all. I have never hurt anyone, or stolen other people's things, or made trouble for anyone."

"That isn't true, is it?" the Abbot interrupted.

"It is true, Luang Poh. I will even take an oath," the man said earnestly.

"I don't like oaths. All right, if you cannot reconsider, never mind. But why do you suppose that voice told you to purify your mind? If someone commits no evil, why must he purify his mind?"

"This is what I wanted to ask you, sir," Buahyao said.

"Now then, I will tell you. What you have described to me is not a dream. It is called a *nimitta*, a vision or a sign. A person who receives a sign like this is fortunate, because such clear signs are rare. It is like someone

who dies and then returns to life again, and tells other people that he was in hell while he was dead. We should say that such a man is very fortunate," the Abbot repeated.

"Why do you call someone who has been in hell a fortunate person, sir?" Buahyao asked, doubtfully.

"What else can we call him? Not many people get a second chance. He is fortunate because he has the opportunity to purify his mind. After seeing for himself that hell exists, he will commit no more evil, but will do good instead. And in doing good, he will not have to enter lower states of existence again after death," Phra Khru Charoen explained.

"'Lower states of existence' means hell, doesn't it?" Buahyao asked with interest, for the fragrance of his former virtue still remained.

"Lower states of existence are states of misery, of which there are four—hell, the realm of hungry ghosts, the realm of demons, and the realm of beasts. Anyone who commits evil must descend to lower states of existence after his death."

"What kind of action is called evil, sir?" the man asked.

"Violating the Five Precepts. Do you know the Five Precepts? Did your parents ever take you to the temple to make merit?" the Abbot asked, although he knew the man's answer already.

"Never, sir. They never did. We went to the temple only when there was an annual festival, to see films," the man replied honestly.

"So you don't know the Five Precepts?"

"No, sir. Please tell me, Luang Poh," Buahyao asked earnestly.

"Well then, listen carefully. The Five Precepts are to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants which cause heedlessness," explained the Phra Khru. Teaching Dhamma was his duty. Hearing the Abbot's words, Buahyao was moved, for he had violated two of the precepts: killing and false speech. Three were still intact; the last one, especially, he was determined not to violate. It was because of intoxicants that his father had died so pitifully.

"Luang Poh, is killing animals sinful?" he asked hesitantly.

"Certainly," replied the Abbot.

"So I am very sinful, because I have killed cows and buffaloes every day except for the Buddhist observance days, when it is forbidden. I thought that only killing people was sinful." The man had suddenly understood that his surroundings and the way that he had been brought up had made him coarse, although by nature his mind was sensitive and filled with loving-kindness and compassion. Because of them, having been befriended

by a good person like Venerable Phra Khru Charoen, awareness of right and wrong now arose in his mind.

"Now you understand why you need to purify your mind, don't you?" asked the Abbot.

"Yes, sir," Buahyao replied. He sat still, with his eyes cast down to the floor, feeling ashamed for having lied to the Abbot about his origin. For a while he kept silent, but at last he decided to ask, "Luang Poh, would you let someone become a monk here even if he was not Thai?"

"Why shouldn't I? It does not depend on origin. I will accept anyone who has faith and wants to become a monk if he has enough of the necessary qualities," the Abbot answered.

"What are those qualities, sir?"

"First of all, he must have thirty-two physical qualities, such as not being crippled or disabled, not mad, blind or deaf. He must also have the consent of his parents, or of his wife if he is married."

"But if his father is dead and he has no wife, is he still able to be a monk, sir?"

"Has his mother given her permission?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, he can. There is no difficulty. Why do you ask this?" The Phra Khru pretended ignorance. In fact, he already knew the man's thoughts.

"Luang Poh, I beg your forgiveness for having lied to you," said the man.

"What about?" asked the Abbot.

"I lied to you about being Thai. My parents are Vietnamese but I was born in Thailand. So my nationality is Thai but my origin is Vietnamese," he confessed.

"But why did you have to lie? Why didn't you tell me the truth?" asked the Abbot. He knew the reason, but he wanted the man to purify his mind by making an apology.

"I was afraid that if I told the truth, you wouldn't let me become a monk, sir," Buahyao answered.

"Oh? When did I promise you that?" The Abbot only meant to tease, but Buahyao's hope and joy evaporated immediately.

Chapter 2

For a long time, Buahyao sat with his legs folded beneath him, deeply troubled by the Abbot's apparent refusal to let him become a monk. Feeling stiff, he stretched out his legs. He gazed at the Phra Khru with despair in his eyes and wondered how he could persuade the Abbot to accept him. But the more he thought, the more depressed he became.

Sensing Buahyao's torment, the Abbot took pity on him. "I was only teasing you," he said. "Now then, if it is your wish, I'll let you ordain. You said you had completed the fourth grade, so you can read, is that so?"

"Yes, sir, I can," the man replied. His heart filled with joy again.

"Well, you must memorize some Pali words, and when you succeed, I shall let you become a monk."

"How many days will they take to learn, sir?" Buahyao asked eagerly.

"It depends on you. If you have a good memory, it may take you between three and seven days. If not, it may take months. Now then, I will find a monk to assist you, since I do not have much time myself. I have to teach vipassana meditation and welcome the guests who come and visit me every day. Some days I go out to teach Dhamma when I am invited. If I refused to go, people would accuse me of neglecting my duty." The last sentence he spoke in a murmur.

"Where is the monk you mentioned, sir?"

"He is here in the monastery," the Abbot replied. "Somchai, come here." He called the lay attendant who was cleaning upstairs. The young man crept in.

"Go and see whether Phra Maha Boon is in his room. If so, tell him to see me here." The young attendant went to the door on his knees, then stood up and walked. After a moment he came back with a monk of about forty years of age. Phra Maha Boon paid respect to the Abbot by making a

five-point prostration with forehead, elbows, and knees all touching the floor, and asked, "Luang Poh, what can I do for you, sir?"

"Please help me to instruct this man. He wants to become a monk. You will help him to memorize the Pali phrases. Buahyao, this is Phra Maha Boon. Pay respects to him," the Abbot ordered. The man folded his hands in respect and smiled at the monk.

"You must teach him how to make a prostration, too. It might be hard work," the Abbot said, with a note of concern.

"Don't worry, sir, I'll do my best. Where will he stay, sir?" Phra Maha Boon asked.

"Please let him stay at your lodging. After the rains-retreat, there may be an empty room for him. The observance day after next will be the last day of the retreat. It may not be so comfortable for you for the next two weeks." This last sentence he addressed to Buahyao.

"Never mind, sir. Thank you, and Phra Maha Boon, very much for helping me." His words were none too elegant, but they were sincere.

"Now then, it's settled. Take him to your lodging and if there is any problem, please come and tell me. Buahyao, you must obey this monk," the Abbot told the man. Phra Maha Boon prostrated to the Abbot three times, and told Buahyao to do the same. He did so, in an awkward fashion, for he had never done it before.

From that day on, whoever passed Phra Maha Boon's lodging would hear a voice from within reciting the *tacapañicakakammaññāna*, the meditation on five parts of the body: "*Kesa, loma, nakhā, danta, taco ... taco, danta, nakhā, loma, kesa. ...*" Hair of the head, body hair, nails, teeth, skin"—forwards and backwards. Phra Maha Boon commented that although Buahyao seemed to be a bit clumsy, he was obedient and also had a good memory, for he was able to memorize some Pali words correctly and clearly within four days. Besides that, he could make prostrations better than he had before. The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan listened to Phra Maha Boon's report with satisfaction.

Five days before the end of the rains-retreat, Buahyao was ordained. The ordination ceremony was held at Wat Ambhavan. Venerable Phra Khru Charoen acted as preceptor, and the two monks who chanted the ritual words were Phra Maha Boon as the first ordination teacher, and Phra Maha Pleng as the second. Another twenty-two monks were present as witnesses. All of these twenty-five monks were from Wat Ambhavan.

The Abbot did not go out for alms on the day of the ceremony. After practicing vipassana meditation, he took the barber to shave Buahyao's head.

First the barber cut the man's hair to shorten it, and then he took a razor to it. As soon as the blade touched his head, Buahyao felt a sudden shiver through his body. He thought of his parents, especially his father, and wished that they could have attended the ceremony. He did not know where his father was; maybe he had been born into a state of misery, for the Abbot said that anyone who had committed evil would be reborn there. The more he thought, the sadder he felt. Tears fell from his eyes. He cried for a while, until the Abbot noticed. The barber said nothing, just went on with his work.

"Why are you crying?" asked the Abbot.

"I ... I miss my parents, sir," the man answered, sobbing.

"Why? You say your step-father is a good man, so I think your mother should be happy."

"Yes, sir, but I would like her to be here at the ceremony and see my yellow robes," the man said as he wiped away his tears.

"Certainly she will see your robes. After you have purified your mind you can go and visit her. Don't fret yourself," the Abbot said.

"Yes, sir," the man murmured, and stopped crying. They were silent for a moment, then Buahyao said, "Venerable Luang Poh, and ... and my father? I don't know ... where was he reborn?" and again he was crying.

The Phra Khru consoled him. "Don't worry so much. Relax—today is your big day. You must think of yourself. Help yourself first, then think of helping others. If you jump into a deep pond to save someone from drowning, you need to know how to swim first. In your father's case, if after this you practice vipassana meditation and transmit your merits to him, you may be able to reduce his suffering," the Abbot said, and handed him a tissue to wipe away his tears.

"Sir, is that really possible?" asked the man, remembering to thank the Abbot as he took the tissue.

"Why should I lie?"

Buahyao was afraid that he had made the Abbot angry, so he said, "I beg your pardon, sir. I will practice as hard as I can."

"Fine. I say amen to that. Remember that nothing is impossible for a person who exerts great effort."

After his head was shaved, the man was told by the Abbot to bathe in preparation for the ceremony, which would be held in the uposatha, the consecrated assembly hall, at 9 a.m.

That night, the ordination completed, Phra (Venerable) Buahyao went to his preceptor's quarters with a gold-colored, mounted offering tray, bearing flowers, candles and incense sticks, to seek instruction in vipassana

meditation. One of the rules of this monastery was that every new monk would learn the practice again, having learned it once during the ordination ceremony in the morning. After Phra Buahyao announced his intention to be a meditator, the Phra Khru began to instruct the new monk himself.

The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan had a lot of experience in meditation. When he was newly ordained he learned *samatha kammatthana*, the art of concentration, by reciting, "Buddho." He had practiced this method for years, until he was able to attain special powers known as *lokiya-abhiññā*. These derive from concentration rather than insight and are described as mundane, not permanent; they do not lead to liberation from worldly concerns. However, when he was forty-five, he had walked to Dong Phraya Yen Forest, to look for a teacher who could guide him. Here, he had been able to learn vipassana meditation based upon the Four Foundations of Mindfulness from the "Monk in the Forest." He discovered that no other way was as noble as this one. Only then did he truly understand the words of the Buddha, which he had read many times in the Pali Canon:

"O monks! This is the one and only way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for entering into the Noble Path and for the realization of Nibbana: this way is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness."

It was the great good fortune of the Abbot to find a true spiritual friend, for the Monk in the Forest had all of the seven qualities of a good friend: endearing, inspiring, cultured, wise, patient, able to convey profound instructions, and never exhorting without a reason. Venerable Phra Khru Charoen practiced vipassana meditation with the Monk in the Forest for one month. Practicing the right way, being diligent, finding a good spiritual friend, and having done good deeds: these four qualities made his efforts fruitful, enabling him at last to attain the stages of holiness that are called supramundane. Since then, he had found true happiness, and realized that *natthi santi param sukham*—there is no greater happiness than peace.

His heart was filled with loving-kindness, and he wished for all beings who were in the cycle of birth and death to attain this state of happiness. So he transformed the monastery into a vipassana meditation school. He taught the resident monks and novices the methods of practicing meditation such as walking and sitting, and how to be mindful in every posture and action: standing, walking, sitting, lying down, eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, and so on. Wat Ambhavan became a sanctuary for people seeking spiritual peace.

Before beginning his instruction, the Phra Khru questioned the new monk to examine his store of knowledge.

"Phra Maha Boon has taught you something, hasn't he?" He meant the practice of meditation.

"Yes, sir," answered the new monk.

"What has he taught you?"

"He has taught me the same as you have done, sir," answered Phra Buahyao faithfully.

"I have not taught you anything yet," the preceptor objected.

"Yes you have, sir. You have taught me to obey Phra Maha Boon, and he taught me to obey you," the new monk explained.

"But what I am talking about is meditation practice. Has Phra Maha Boon taught you about walking and sitting meditation?" the Abbot asked. He was gradually coming to realize how awkward his new pupil was.

"Not yet, sir." This time the new monk replied with understanding.

"If that is so, we'll start right now. Now then, please stand up. I'll teach you walking meditation first," he ordered, and stood up. Phra Buahyao followed, resolving to do his best. He felt that this preceptor was worthy of great respect, and was also capable of inspiring religious devotion in him. The new monk hoped that the Abbot would be like a doctor who could cure his disease.

"There are six stages in walking meditation. At the first stage you recite to yourself once, at the second you recite twice, at the third three times and so on. At the sixth stage you recite to yourself six times. Each stage is accompanied by *sati*," the preceptor explained.

"What is *sati*, sir?"

"It means mindfulness or attentiveness, which is the most important factor in practicing meditation. Without mindfulness the effort is futile. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, and if that is so, will you please teach me all the six stages today, so I don't have to bother you later?" Phra Buahyao asked reverently.

"We can't do that. We must practice one stage a day. Don't be impatient. In practicing meditation, if you want success, you must be mentally calm. Now then, I will demonstrate the first stage of walking. You must stand straight like this. Hold your hands behind you at waist level, with your left hand in your right like this." The new monk did as he was told, but with his right hand in his left, and both hands at the level of his bottom.

"That's not right," the preceptor said, putting his pupil's hands in the right position.

"Now then, recite five times, 'standing.' Each time, breathe deeply and be mindful, directing your mindfulness from the top of the forehead down to your feet, and then from your feet up to your forehead. Try it." The new monk did so purposefully, and the Abbot was satisfied with his obedience.

"Luang Poh, why must we recite, 'standing' five times?"

"It comes from the *tacapañcakakammaññhāna*, have you forgotten? Tell me what they are."

"*Kesa, lomā, nakha, danta, taco*, sir," the new monk replied immediately.

"Translate."

"Hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin, sir."

"Very good. So we recite, 'standing' five times, in order to consider these five constituents. Some schools may teach differently, but the purpose is the same, that is, to attain liberation. Now then, after reciting five times, we begin the first stage of walking. Please tell me where your mindfulness is now."

"At the feet, sir," answered the pupil.

"All right. Now bring it to the right foot on its own. At the first stage you must recite, 'Right step,' while slowly moving your right foot forward. Then bring your mindfulness to the left foot and recite, 'Left step,' while moving your left foot forward." The Abbot demonstrated four or five steps, and then commanded the new monk to try it. Phra Buahyao quickly paced off a few steps.

"Stop! Stop! Don't walk so fast. You must walk very slowly, like I showed you."

"Why do we have to walk so slowly, sir? It's not natural," the new monk asked, puzzled.

"Walking slowly is for seeing the truth. If you walk so quickly, the truth will be hidden by your movements. Do you understand?"

The pupil did not answer. Instead, he asked, "What is the truth, sir?"

"If you want to know, you must try to practice both walking and sitting meditation as hard as you can. You must also train your mindfulness in every posture. When your mindfulness becomes good, you will understand what the truth is."

"Does that mean that my mindfulness is not good? Oh no, respected Luang Poh, I have no mental problems," the new monk said, misunderstanding.

"I am not saying that you have. Remember this: if you become a teacher, you must not instruct people in meditation practice if they are insane. Some

people do not understand this. They think that by practicing, a mad person can become sane. This is not true. I have seen such cases.

"Last month, a university lecturer came here. She had a mental illness, and her relatives brought her here to practice meditation. It was Phra Maha Boon who instructed her, because I was busy that day. After three days, she became totally mad. She sang songs loudly and danced beautifully. Her relatives were very frightened, and asked her to stop, but she couldn't because her madness had gone too far."

"So what did her relatives do, sir?"

"They asked me to cure her, but I told them I was not a psychiatrist. I suggested that they take her to a mental hospital."

"Was she willing to go?"

"She was not at first, but after her relatives told her that they would take her to another monastery where singing and dancing were taught, she eventually agreed to go."

"Why can't a mad person practice meditation, sir?" the puzzled monk asked hesitantly.

"I won't answer you. You will find out for yourself after practicing hard. I warn you now that doubt is one of the obstacles to practicing, so you must concentrate only on meditation. If you can do this, your doubts will eventually disappear," the preceptor advised his pupil.

"Yes, sir, Luang Poh. I must practice and make swift progress," the new monk said with confidence, and began practicing with a will.

"Now then, after walking about three meters forward, you should stop and recite, 'standing,' five times, and then turn around while reciting, 'turning,' four times, moving your feet like this." He showed how it was done, and Phra Buahyao followed his example without any difficulty.

"Now then, after you have turned around, you recite, 'standing,' five times and begin to walk again; this is the method of the first stage of walking meditation. Tomorrow I will teach you how to practice sitting meditation and the second stage of walking meditation.

"Now then, you can go to your lodging and practice walking meditation for an hour. After that lie on the floor, placing your right hand on your abdomen, and notice its rising and falling. When it rises, recite to yourself, 'rising,' and when it falls recite, 'falling.' Do this until you fall asleep. Try to notice whether you fall asleep at the moment of rising or of falling. All right, you may go now."

"Luang Poh, sir, thank you so much for instructing me with kindness and compassion." The new monk prostrated gratefully to his preceptor three

times. Then he crept slowly to the door and walked to the lodging which he shared with Phra Maha Boon. He recited to himself, 'right,' and 'left,' as he walked back. However, his preceptor's voice saying, "Now then, now then," was still loud in his ears. "These must be his favorite words," thought the new monk.



Chapter 3

Phra Buahyao arrived at his lodging with a feeling of joy. After washing his hands and feet, he chanted alone, for the monks staying in this monastery would meet in Uposatha Hall and chant the *Patimokkha* Precepts, the code of monks' rules, only on the Buddhist holy days.

Phra Maha Boon gave him an alarm clock and said, "Keep this to wake you up. It will be necessary at first, but when you have practiced hard, your mind will know the time by itself, and you won't need the clock any more. It's very strange; when Luang Poh told me this, I didn't believe him, yet I found out for myself that it is true." He taught the new monk how to use the clock, and then he practiced reclining meditation until he fell asleep.

Phra Buahyao set the alarm clock for one hour and began to practice walking meditation. He walked up and down his room, which was about three meters across. He was absorbed in his walking meditation until the loud noise of the alarm clock broke through his concentration. He reset it to wake him up at 4 a.m., then took his bedding, which consisted of a pillow, a mat and a blanket, and laid it out near Phra Maha Boon's. He switched off the light and lay down beneath the blanket. The air was quite chilly, because the cool season was approaching.

Phra Buahyao placed his right hand on his abdomen, noticing its rising and falling. He recited, "rising," and "falling," to himself as his preceptor had instructed, but in a moment he fell asleep without noticing which came last.

The alarm clock rang loudly, accompanied by the sounding of the monastery bell. This was followed by the noise of the dogs, which barked and howled whenever they heard the bell ringing. Phra Buahyao was startled, but still felt sleepy. It was so cold in the early morning, and it was

more pleasant to hide beneath the blanket than to get up. The new monk pressed the stop button on the alarm, intending to stay where he was, but a powerful voice warned him, "Buahyao! If you are lazy and indulge in sleep instead of cultivating effort, then you will be unable to purify your mind. You have taken the right path. Don't be discouraged! Wake up and practice walking meditation."

Phra Buahyao recognized this as the mystical voice that he had heard the previous year. He hurriedly rose and brushed his teeth, then chanted and began to practice walking meditation. Phra Maha Boon had gone out to practice alone in front of the Uposatha Hall, because he wanted the Vietnamese monk to be able to practice freely.

The noisy crowing of the jungle fowls and the singing of the koels did not bother the new monk, because he could recite to himself, "The jungle fowls are crowing," and, "The koels are singing," and when he heard the noise of the dogs, he recited, "The dogs are barking and howling."

While he was practicing walking meditation, however, he felt his stomach beginning to complain. It was not used to going without food, as he had done since lunch the day before. For a while, there was the noise of breaking wind, and this time he did not know what to recite, because his preceptor had not instructed him about it. The Phra Khru had only taught him to recite about standing, walking, sitting, lying down, eating, drinking, defecating, and urinating, but about breaking wind he had given no instructions. At last, the conscientious monk decided to recite to himself, "I am breaking wind," and he had to do this many times. He did not understand the workings of the body, so he failed to realize that this was a natural phenomenon that happened to everyone who began to practice vipassana meditation.

At six o'clock, Phra Buahyao went out for alms with four other monks, led by Phra Maha Boon. The Abbot limited each group to five monks, to encourage them to spread themselves throughout the surrounding area. Upon returning from the alms round, they walked to the refectory to have their meal with the other monks. The Abbot went out for alms accompanied only by his lay attendant. He ate once a day at his quarters, except for Buddhist observance days or special occasions when groups of people came and offered lunch to the resident monks at the instruction hall. At those times, the Abbot would join them and eat a second meal of the day.

After the monks had finished their meal, the temple boys divided the left-over food into two parts, one for themselves, the other for the monks' lunch. If there was not enough food to eat, the monastery cook would bring

more from the kitchen. Cooking was the most serious work in the monastery, for every day many people came just to practice vipassana meditation. Sometimes they came in groups of a hundred or more. The Phra Khru provided for them well, with both food and lodging. Everyone who came to Wat Ambhavan appreciated his kindness, and no one left feeling that he didn't want to come back again.

Phra Buahyao returned to his lodging, practiced walking meditation to help digestion, and then bathed before going to his preceptor's residence for an interview and to learn how to practice sitting meditation.

"How are you? Did you sleep well last night?" asked the Phra Khru after the new monk had made a five-point prostration and sat in a suitable place.

"Very well, sir," answered the new monk. He did not tell his preceptor about the mystical voice he had heard in the morning, since he did not want to be criticized for his laziness.

"Were you able to notice whether you fell asleep at the moment of rising or falling?"

"I ... I couldn't, sir," the new monk confessed. He thought that his preceptor would scold him, but the Abbot said, "Now then, never mind, you will try again tonight." Hearing the preceptor's words, the new monk felt relieved. He even thought to himself, "There! Luang Poh has spoken his favorite words again; maybe he says them hundreds of times a day." The pupil did not know that his mind was being penetrated by his teacher.

"A good pupil must not banter with his teacher." The Abbot spoke in an ordinary tone, but his words frightened the new monk.

"How can you know, sir?" he asked softly.

"How can I not know?" retorted the Phra Khru. Phra Buahyao could not restrain himself from thinking, "My preceptor is like a miracle man. Maybe he is a fully enlightened being, an *Arahant*."

"I am neither a miracle man nor an *Arahant*," the Phra Khru said, smiling. Phra Buahyao was even more bewildered. How could his preceptor read other people's minds?

"Don't wonder how I can. If you practice hard at your meditation, you will also be able to do so. It is not so difficult," he said. The new monk resolved to do his best.

"Now then, we will begin right away. Can you clearly feel rising and falling as you breathe in and out?"

"Only rising is clear. Falling is not, sir."

"You must try to make it so. When your mind becomes more vigilant

than it is now, you will be able to. Don't be discouraged. Now then, I will explain briefly the Foundations of Mindfulness. There are four, and they concern the body, feelings, the mind, and ideas. Today we will talk about the first.

"The way to practice is to contemplate the body in every moment, such as when inhaling, exhaling, standing, walking, sitting, lying down, defecating, urinating, and so on, as I have said before. 'The body' here means our own body, not anyone else's. You must be concerned only with your own body. The way you practiced and recited this morning was not correct because it concerned things happening outside the body, so it could not be called 'mindfulness regarding the body.' Do you remember what you recited this morning?"

"Yes, sir, I recited, 'The cocks are crowing,' and 'The dogs are barking,'" the new monk answered, observing that his preceptor had given him occasion to wonder many times this morning. Suddenly, he thought about having recited, "I am breaking wind," and felt worried, not sure whether his teacher knew this or not.

"Why would I not know it?" the Abbot said, as if he knew just what the new monk was thinking, then he added, "That was not correct either. No one recites like that."

Phra Buahyao felt ashamed. He entreated the Abbot: "Luang Poh, I recited it only to myself; how could you hear it? Anyway, I was reciting in my room."

"I know because I recited, 'perceiving.' Buahyao, you must remember that 'perceiving' is worth more than millions of baht. Don't think that it is nonsense. If you train your mindfulness to the highest degree, you can attain 'perceiving,' and you will also be able to use it for innumerable benefits."

"Can we use it to see a winning lottery ticket number?"

"Certainly. But no one should use it in that way, because the purpose of practicing meditation is to purify the mind of the defilements, which are greed, aversion and delusion. If you use it to see a lottery ticket number, your defilements will increase, and this is not the purpose of the practice," explained the Abbot.

"Yes, sir, I understand. Luang Poh, please continue explaining mindfulness regarding the body. I am listening," the new monk requested.

"Now then, before you can understand this, you must first understand the twelve sense-fields, which are divided into six internal fields and six external fields. The internal sense-fields are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body,

and mind; the external sense-fields are form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects. What your eye detects is called form, what your ear detects is called sound, and what your nose detects is called smell. Please tell me, what do we call anything that is detected by the tongue?" asked the teacher.

"A meal, sir," answered the pupil confidently.

"Not correct. Try again."

"Teeth, sir," Phra Buahyao answered, but this time he was not so sure.

"No. Have another go," ordered the preceptor.

"I don't know, sir," the new monk surrendered.

"Now then, please tell me, when you eat and you know that the meal is spicy, or sweet, or salty, what do you say?" the preceptor asked, trying to help his student find the answer.

"Delicious, sir," the pupil quickly replied. The Phra Khru was unable to bear any more, so he gave the answer himself, saying, "It is called 'taste,' what your body detects is called touch, and what your mind detects is called a mental object."

"Thank you, sir. I understand now," said the student.

"Now then, please tell me the six external sense-fields," the Abbot ordered.

"The eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, sir," Phra Buahyao quickly replied.

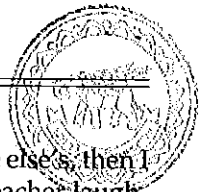
"Oh, then your eye, your ear and so forth, and your mind are outside your body. Are they separated from your body? Answer again," the preceptor commanded.

"Form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects, sir," the new monk answered.

"Now then, since you know the internal sense-fields, you will know what to recite when you contact these sense-objects."

"Luang Poh, does 'to recite' mean the same as 'to note' sir?" asked the pupil.

"Yes, you can use either 'to recite' or 'to note.' Now then, when you hear cocks crowing, dogs barking or any other noise with the ear, you must only recite to yourself, 'hearing.' Don't investigate what or whose noise it is. Whatever your eye detects, you must recite, 'seeing,' and that is sufficient. Don't investigate. By the way, when you are breaking wind, if there is a noise, you must recite, 'hearing,' but if there is not, you recite 'knowing,' which means that you are using the mind to know it. Now then, if it has a smell, what will you recite to yourself?" asked the teacher.



"If it's mine, I will recite, 'good smell,' but if it's someone else's, then I will recite, 'bad smell,' sir." The student's answer made the teacher laugh.

"Oh good, good. Your answer is very good," said the preceptor. The new monk was glad, since he thought that his answer was correct. After he stopped laughing, the teacher said, "Buahyao, I really do not know whether you are obedient or obstinate." He had not finished speaking when the pupil interrupted, "I am neither obedient nor obstinate, sir."

"Now then, now then, to tell the truth, I don't know either whether you are clever or stupid."

"I am neither clever nor stupid, sir," the pupil interrupted again.

"Yes, yes. Now then, I suppose I think that you are clever, and I hope that you remain clever forever." The Abbot intended to speak sarcastically.

"Thank you, sir," the new monk said with hands folded in reverence. The Abbot was tiring of this discussion with the younger monk, so he returned to the previous topic, concerning the twelve sense-fields.

"Now then, after you have understood the twelve sense-fields, both internal and external, when you practice you will be able to recite correctly. Remember that you must not investigate. What you can do is only to 'know.'"

"Why can't we investigate, sir?" asked the new monk.

"Because doing that is engaging in the defilements. For example, if you recite, 'good smell,' it's greed, if you recite, 'bad smell,' it's aversion, and if you ignore it, it's ignorance. So, it will only be correct if you recite, 'smell,' without investigating whether it is fragrant or foul. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Good. Now then, please tell me what you will recite to yourself if you hear the birds singing," the Abbot said, testing him again.

"Hearing,' sir."

"Why don't you recite, 'The birds are singing?'"

"Because that would not be 'mindfulness regarding the body,' as it is happening outside the body, and we must be mindful only of what is within the body."

"Very good. Now then, we will begin to learn about sitting meditation. Remember that after you have finished your walking meditation, you practice sitting meditation. You must practice walking and sitting meditation continuously in order to remain mindful of your sense objects during the entire practice period. Sitting meditation is done like this: after you have finished practicing walking meditation, you recite five times to yourself,

'standing,' then you recite, 'sitting,' while slowly lowering yourself to the floor, and you sit in the lotus position like this." The Abbot demonstrated, and the new monk did the same.

"Now then, put your hands in your lap with your right hand on the left one, your body upright, back straight, and mindfulness established. Close your eyes slowly and breathe deeply. Focus your mind on the area of the abdomen, within about two inches of the navel, rising and falling each time you breathe. As you breathe in, the abdomen rises, and you recite to yourself, 'Rising.' As you breathe out, the abdomen falls, and you recite, 'falling.'

"You should not let your mind wander. Concentrate on the movement of your abdomen. Although this is easy to say, it is difficult to practice, because the mind is wild and hard to control. The Buddha compared it to a monkey. A monkey cannot stay still for a minute, except when it is asleep. Even then, it does not sleep for long."

"Luang Poh, that is a very long explanation. I don't think I understand all of it," the new monk complained.

"Never mind, this time you may not, but later you will be able to," said the Abbot in an ordinary tone of voice. "Now then, can you feel rising and falling?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which comes first?"

"Rising, sir."

"That's right. A person who says that falling comes first is wrong, for by nature we notice rising before falling. Now then, try to sit for forty minutes. Please focus your mind on rising and falling. Whatever you hear or smell, you can recite to yourself as I have instructed you. Remember not to investigate. Start now, and I will tell you when the time is up."

Chapter 4

The forty minutes seemed a long time to Phra Buahyao. He was able to concentrate on rising and falling only at first, but after that he found it very difficult because the movement was too quick for him to follow. He began to feel very uneasy. The wind inside his stomach was becoming disturbed again. He tried to control it, because he did not want to break wind in front of the Abbot, but the more he tried, the worse it became. He was so worried about it that he could not concentrate at all on rising and falling.

"Don't try to control it. It is the manifestation of a natural phenomenon. What you can do is recite to yourself, 'hearing,' or 'smelling,' just as it actually is," said the Abbot. The new monk felt relieved. He let it happen naturally and began to concentrate on rising and falling again. After a while, he began to feel pain throughout his body, especially in his legs. He wanted to ask the Abbot whether he could move his legs or not, but his preceptor said, "Don't move. You are experiencing 'mindfulness regarding feeling,' and by practicing like this, you will understand the truth. Contemplate the pain and recite to yourself, 'pain, pain' for a while. Then return to concentrating on rising and falling, and ignore the pain."

The new monk's enthusiasm was renewed with the help of the Abbot, who could even penetrate his thoughts. He wasn't worried any more, and he set his mind on doing his best. The Phra Khru wanted the new monk to practice alone, so he quietly walked upstairs. Phra Buahyao didn't know that his preceptor had gone; he tried to concentrate on rising and falling as the pain became more and more intense. At last his patience was exhausted; he caught his left leg and placed it slowly on the right one. He felt better, and was glad that his preceptor did not scold him. The new monk became arrogant and the concept of 'I' appeared with the thought that he had

practiced correctly. Then his mind became flurried, for it was its nature to be restless. In the few minutes that the Abbot was gone, the new monk thought of many things, not concentrating at all on rising and falling.

Ten minutes of the period remained when the Abbot came back and "checked" the person who was practicing sitting meditation. Knowing what the new monk was thinking, he said, "Oh, you have been enjoying yourself thinking! Why don't you recite, 'restless, restless?'" Phra Buahyao stopped his thinking and mentally recited many times, 'restless, restless.' After that he returned to concentrating on rising and falling. But his legs became very painful, as if they were about to break into pieces. He was about to change his posture when the Abbot forbade him: "Don't do that. You must recite, 'be patient,' 'make effort,' for a while, then return to reciting, 'rising,' and 'falling.'"

"It's unbearable, Luang Poh," the new monk thought, for he realized that his preceptor would know his thoughts.

"You must endure it and determine: 'I will sacrifice even my life, even unto death.'"

"But I don't want to die, sir," Phra Buahyao argued within himself.

"No-one wants to die. But when one's life is over, one must die, even though one doesn't want to; and someone who dies while practicing will be born in happy states, not in states of sorrow. You can choose: which do you want?"

"I prefer the first, sir."

"Good. You must be brave, and so fit to be called a 'son of the Buddha.' You have to understand that what you are experiencing now is 'mindfulness regarding feelings.'"

"Does the word 'feeling' mean 'pity' sir?" the pupil thought.

"No." The preceptor continued to speak his answers, for the pupil could not read his mind. "'Feelings' here means sensations, of which there are three kinds: pleasant, painful, and neutral. You must recite what you really feel. For instance, when you feel pain, you recite, 'pain, pain.' When you have a pleasant feeling, you recite, 'pleasant feeling, pleasant feeling.' If you feel neither pain nor pleasure, you recite, 'indifference, indifference.' This means that you must be mindful all of the time, and remember that you simply know the feelings. Do not investigate them or cling to them."

The young monk tried to apply his mindfulness to force down his pain, but the more he tried, the more painful it became. Phra Buahyao felt as if his life was coming to an end. At the moment of crisis, he gathered his mental strength and resolved that he would make the sacrifice, even unto

death. After that, he sat still, ignoring the suffering, and concentrating only on rising and falling.

"Now then, the time is up. Recite three times 'wanting to relax,' then slowly open your eyes and recite, 'seeing,' of what you have seen," ordered the Abbot.

At that moment of suffering, the preceptor's words seemed like a heavenly voice coming from the sky. His battle with pain came to an end. Phra Buahyao did as the Abbot had told him. When he opened his eyes, he saw first his preceptor's kindly face. The new monk was overwhelmed; he cried tears of joy. He prostrated to the Abbot in gratitude. Morality, concentration, and wisdom had cleansed his mind, transforming it from rough to fine. The show of gratitude was quite spontaneous.

"Now then, let's evaluate your practice, and after that you can go and relax at your lodging. Tonight I will instruct you in how to practice the second stage of walking meditation."

"Yes, sir, but I would like to ask you, why is the mind so restless? While I am practicing meditation I think of countless things. There is no peace, even for a minute. But when I do not meditate, I do not think so much."

"Yes, that is the nature of the mind. That is why the Buddha compares it to a monkey, and that is why we have to train our minds."

"And why is it restless only when we are practicing?" the new monk asked.

"It is restless all the time, whether you are practicing or not, because its function is to be aware of sense-objects. But you feel its wildness only when you are practicing, because you are applying mindfulness in order to control it, to concentrate on one single sense-object; then it tries to resist. To put it more simply, the mind is always restless, but we are not aware of it until we try to control it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I thank you very much for giving me such a clear explanation," the pupil said gratefully. The Phra Khru felt grateful to Phra Maha Boon for having taught the new monk better manners.

"Luang Poh, there is something that I still don't understand; something about 'mindfulness regarding feelings' that you taught me while I was practicing sitting meditation. You forbade me from clinging to either pleasant or painful feelings. What does this mean, sir?"

"It means that feelings are impermanent, stressful and not-self, just like all other conditioned things, which have the characteristics of arising, being, and ceasing. So there is nothing to cling to. Your duty is only to ob-

serve them mindfully, and you will see their changes. For example, when you are practicing sitting meditation, you feel pain, so you mentally recite, 'pain, pain' for a while; then you ignore it, and it will eventually disappear."

"We recite, 'pain, pain,' to make the pain disappear, is that right, sir?"

"No. Some people misunderstand, and think that the feeling of pain will be made to disappear by reciting in this way. In fact, a painful feeling will disappear by itself whether we recite or not. Because it has the characteristics of arising, being, and ceasing, we cannot control it. All we can do is to recognize it, and to let it come and go," the Phra Khru explained.

Suddenly, he noticed that his lay attendant was peering in at the door. "Somchai, what is it?" he asked. The lay attendant crept in, prostrated three times, and reported, "Three men from Nakhonswan Province have come to practice vipassana meditation, sir."

"Tell them to come in." Hearing that guests were coming, Phra Buahyao was going to excuse himself, but the Abbot told him to stay. In a few minutes a middle-aged man crept in with an offering tray carrying flowers, candles, and incense sticks, accompanied by two friends of the same age.

The three men stated that they wished to learn vipassana meditation. The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan ordered the new monk to guide them and also to instruct them in the practice of both walking and sitting meditation. The new monk felt awkward, for he himself had begun learning only two days before. However, he instructed them conscientiously, until the three men could practice the first stage of walking meditation, and sitting meditation as well.

"Now then, go and have lunch at the monastery kitchen. After that you must practice by yourselves at your lodging. Do you have quarters here?" the Abbot asked the man who had carried the tray. He seemed to be their leader.

"No, sir, we have just arrived," came the polite reply.

"Somchai, go and see which lodging is vacant," the Phra Khru ordered.

"They are all occupied. sir, I have just checked," replied the lay attendant.

"If that is so, you will have to stay at the instruction hall. I will order the monastery boys to bring you bedding. How long will you stay?"

"Three days, sir. After we have learned how to meditate, we will practice at home," the leader replied.

"Why don't you stay for seven days? Three days are not enough."

"We can't, sir. We are schoolteachers, and we have to teach. Now we are on holiday."

"You are on holiday for only three days?"

"We have fifteen days, sir, but we just wanted to come on these last three days."

"I see. Very well, if you practice intensively, I think that you can receive some benefit within three days. What are your names, so that if we meet again, I may address you correctly?"

"I am Mr. Srist, sir, the headmaster."

"I am Mr. Boonmee, and the other gentleman is Mr. Aroon. We are only accompanying the headmaster."

"Oh, you are only accompanying him. I thought that you intended to come here to practice, but in fact you are only his companions. Still, you have come, so you must do your best to practice. Somchai, take the guests to the monastery kitchen." The last sentence he addressed to the lay attendant. Then he told the three teachers, "Follow this young man, have lunch first and then begin to practice afterwards. If there are any problems, please come and tell me." The three teachers prostrated to the Abbot and to Phra Buahyao three times, and then followed the lay attendant, the headmaster walking in front of his two friends.

"Now then, Buahyao, remember that this headmaster will soon win the first prize in the lottery. Do you believe me?"

"How do you know, sir?"

"Well, 'perceiving' has told me. You wait and see. He will come back to this monastery within seven days of going home."

"Will you tell him this news, sir?"

"No. If I do, he won't concentrate on practicing."

"Luang Poh, sir, will I attain 'perceiving'?" the new monk asked eagerly.

"It depends on conditions. If you do your best and practice diligently, perhaps you will," the preceptor told his pupil.

"Apart from yourself, is there anyone else who has achieved 'perceiving'?"

"Yes, there are quite a few. It is not too difficult. For example, Madame Lamyai can. She is illiterate, and she doesn't know either walking or sitting meditation, but she has strong faith and great will-power. It is a long story. If you want to hear it, I will tell you one day. Do not forget that the main purpose of your coming here is to purify your mind. Other things are only by-products. Now then, you may go and have lunch, otherwise they will

be waiting for you. It is 11.15 now."

After lunch, the three teachers followed the monastery boy to the instruction hall. Each of them carried a small bag containing his clothes. The monastery boy gave them three sets of bedding, then left them to practice by themselves. The headmaster began to practice walking meditation while the other two were preparing their beds. Mr. Boonmee excused himself. "I'd like to relax for a while. Do you mind practicing alone?" he asked the headmaster.

"I don't mind. I wouldn't blame either of you for sleeping. At least it's kind of you to come with me. Still, it's a pity to waste such a good opportunity. Don't you wonder what is so good here in this monastery that attracts so many people that there are no vacant rooms? We still have plenty of time left in our lives for sleep. It's better to spend our time here gaining knowledge." He stopped speaking and went on practicing walking meditation. The two teachers looked at each other, and then they began to walk too.

All that afternoon, from noon until 6 p.m., anyone passing the instruction hall would have seen the three men walking up and down mindfully and continuously, without rest. The Abbot applied 'perceiving' to check on their practice, and discovered that they were so enraptured with the Dhamma that they could not stop walking. He went to the instruction hall to help them.

Seeing the Abbot coming in, the three teachers quickly made prostrations.

"How are you? You have been walking for six hours without stopping. Don't you feel stiff?"

"Six hours!" the headmaster exclaimed. "I don't know sir. I was so happy that I forgot to practice sitting meditation. If you hadn't come, perhaps we would have been walking until tomorrow morning."

"Certainly, because you all are enraptured with the Dhamma."

"And is that good, sir?" asked Mr. Aroon, speaking for the first time since his arrival at the monastery.

"Not at all, because your concentration is not equal to your effort. To practice effectively, concentration, effort, and mindfulness must be balanced. Now then, please practice sitting meditation for an hour, then take a bath and come to see me at my lodging at 8 p.m."

The three men made prostrations and did as they were told. The Abbot stayed for a while. Then, seeing that they were practicing correctly, he walked back to his quarters

That night, when Phra Buahyao arrived at his preceptor's lodging, he

found the three teachers talking to the Abbot. They prostrated to him when he arrived. Then the Abbot asked the headmaster, "How is your meditation practice? Were you able to notice rising and falling clearly?"

"Yes, sir, but I felt very oppressed. There was a lot of wind in my stomach," the headmaster reported

"What did you do?"

"I let it out in the natural way, sir."

"Did you recite?"

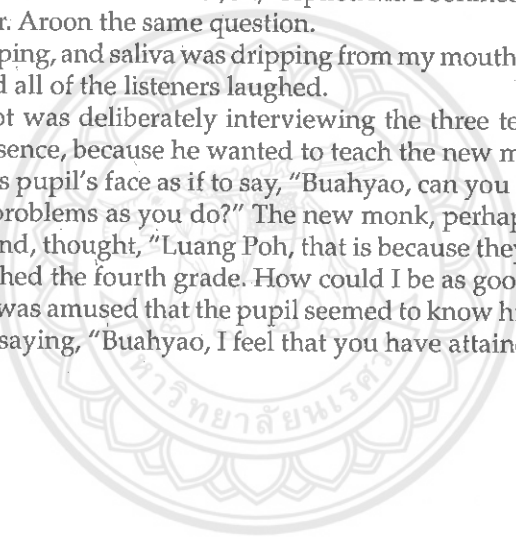
"Yes, sir, I recited as it actually happened, 'hearing,' or 'smelling,'" the man answered clearly.

"And you?" the Abbot asked Mr. Boonmee.

"The same as the headmaster, sir," replied Mr. Boonmee. Then the Phra Khru asked Mr. Aroon the same question.

"I sat sleeping, and saliva was dripping from my mouth, sir," answered Mr. Aroon, and all of the listeners laughed.

The Abbot was deliberately interviewing the three teachers in Phra Buahyao's presence, because he wanted to teach the new monk indirectly. He watched his pupil's face as if to say, "Buahyao, can you see that no one else has such problems as you do?" The new monk, perhaps guessing his preceptor's mind, thought, "Luang Poh, that is because they are educated, but I only finished the fourth grade. How could I be as good as they are?" The preceptor was amused that the pupil seemed to know his thoughts. He teased him by saying, "Buahyao, I feel that you have attained 'perceiving' already."



Chapter 5

Phra Buahyao was smiling broadly, though he knew that the Abbot was only teasing. He felt very happy, for at least it was a good sign that he would be able to attain 'perceiving' one day in the future. The Abbot had said that Madame Lamyai could do it, in spite of being illiterate. He felt superior to her in every respect, for he was literate and could also practice both walking and sitting meditation. The new monk was absorbed in these thoughts when the Abbot remarked, "Well then, I am going to teach you how to practice the second stage of walking meditation, which is the most difficult of the six stages. Buahyao, please tell me how many times we will recite for each step of the second stage."

"Twice, sir, and three times for the third stage."

"Yes, at the second stage you will recite twice, the first time 'lifting' and the second 'treading.' As you recite, 'lifting', you lift your right foot and raise it about three inches from the floor, then move forward slowly without reciting. You will find this very difficult to do; that is why I say that this stage is the most difficult. After moving your foot forward without reciting, you then recite, 'treading' while treading on the floor slowly. Then place your mindfulness on the left foot and do as you have done with the right. When you have walked about three meters in this way, you must stop and recite, 'standing' five times, then slowly turn around while reciting, 'turning' four times."

The Abbot demonstrated about four or five steps, then told the monk and the three laymen to do the same. The three teachers could do it without difficulty, but Phra Buahyao found it so difficult that he perspired. He wanted to argue with his preceptor—"Luang Poh, you have told me that we must practice one stage each day, but why are these teachers allowed to practice two stages?"—but he finally decided not to say anything. Then his

preceptor's voice resounded in his ears: "These three teachers have continuously practiced the first stage for six hours, so I am letting them move on to the second."

Seeing that they had all practiced correctly, the Abbot said, "Now then, you may go back and practice each stage for half an hour, and then practice sitting meditation for one hour. When you finish you may go to bed, but if you want to continue practicing, you may do so.

"Now I'll tell you how to practice 'reclining meditation'. When you have finished sitting meditation, you will recite, 'intending to sleep,' three times, then prepare your bed and do some chanting. After that lie down with mindfulness, put your hand on your abdomen, and try to notice whether you fall asleep at the moment of rising or falling. Don't forget to wake up at 4 a.m. to practice two hours each of walking and sitting meditation. At 8 a.m., please come here for an interview. Now you may go, and if you have any problems, you may come to my residence. If I am sleeping, tell the lay attendant to wake me up," the Abbot said, for 'perceiving' had suggested to him that the new monk would face a big problem that night.

When the three teachers reached the instruction hall, they began to practice as the Abbot had advised, one hour of walking and another hour of sitting. Upon finishing, Mr. Boonmee and Mr. Aroon chanted, prepared their beds and practiced 'reclining meditation.'

The headmaster wanted to get as much benefit as he could, so he began to practice a second time while the two teachers slept happily.

Phra Buahyao set the alarm clock for one hour and began to practice the first stage of walking meditation for about half an hour. Then he practiced the second stage, which he had expected to be very difficult. Still, he practiced it until the alarm rang. The new monk reset the clock for another hour. Then he began to practice sitting meditation, and was able to feel the rising and falling better than before.

After forty-five minutes had passed, he felt pain in his legs, but it was not very severe, so he recited, "knowing." After that it became more intense so he recited, "pain" three times and ignored it. The new monk continued concentrating on rising and falling without changing his posture. When his mind reached the fully focused state known as "one-pointedness" the painful feeling seemed to decrease, and he felt so much better that he could recite, "pleasant feeling." Because of this, he felt disappointed when he heard the alarm. He opened his eyes, pressed the stop button, and began to practice the first stage of walking meditation. This time he did not use the clock, so that he could go on as long as he wanted. He practiced the

first stage of walking meditation for a long time, then the second stage, but for a shorter time because of its difficulty. After that he practiced sitting meditation, longing for that pleasant feeling. The new monk did not know that he was going to be led astray.

Phra Buahyao continued reciting, "rising," and "falling." He felt joy in his heart, because the feeling of pain did not reappear. He was so happy that he did not want to recite, "pleasant feeling," because he mistakenly thought that if he did so, the pleasant feeling would disappear. He was so lost in his happiness that he even forgot to recite "rising" and "falling." When he stopped being mindful his mind began to wander, and he saw himself flying in the sky, surrounded by a beam of light. A beautiful voice whispered in his ears, "You have succeeded! You have succeeded! Go, now you can wander anywhere you wish!"

"If that is so, I want to visit hell. Please take me there," the new monk said to the voice.

"No need for me to take you. You can go by yourself; just by wishing."

"Really? In that case, I wish to visit hell." He then felt that he was flying to hell, and he saw his father being punished by the guardian who dealt out retribution to the wicked in the nether world. The new monk said, "Dear guardian, I will take you to the heavenly abode if you save my father. The man into whose mouth you are pouring boiling water is my father."

"Venerable Brother, not only am I unable to help your father, I am also unable to help my own mother-in-law. I truly am not. My wife once begged me, 'Sweetheart, please help my mother. You must have pity on her,'" said the angel.

"What kind of evil had she done?"

"She killed animals such as hens, ducks, geese and pigs. She killed them to sacrifice at Chinese New Year."

"But why can't you help her?"

"Venerable Brother, I really want to, but the victims do not allow me to. You see? They are protesting over there." Phra Buahyao looked, and saw some beasts crying out, "Don't help her. This evil lady is very cruel. She has tortured us terribly. If you help her, we will ask the Lord of the Underworld to punish you."

"You see, Venerable Brother, I really can't help your father. Suppose I did? The cows and buffaloes would attack me because your father killed so many of them. If you don't believe what I say, I will show you the book of records."

"No need to do that. It's all right, I believe you."

Then Phra Buahyao said to his father, "Dear papa, I have tried to help you, but it's impossible. You must be patient, for I am now practicing vipassana meditation at Wat Ambhavan, and I will dedicate my merits to you later. I am going now to visit the heavenly abode. Good-bye." At that, he flew from hell and visited the six heavens of the sensory realm: the domain of the Four Great Kings, the domain of the Thirty-three Gods, the domain of the Yama Gods, the domain of the satisfied Gods, the domain of the Gods who Rejoice in their own Creations, and the domain of the Gods with Control over the Creations of Others. He saw gods and goddesses clothed in wondrous garments made of dazzling jewels, radiant and lustrous. They prostrated to him when he passed by, and he greeted them in return.

At length, he flew back to his room and saw his coarse physical body sitting there in the lotus posture. He returned to it, re-entered it, and opened his eyes.

What had happened to Phra Buahyao led him to think mistakenly that he had succeeded in his meditations. Now the new monk was eager to report to his preceptor, but it was only 2 a.m., and he could not wait. He wanted his preceptor to know that he had succeeded and had attained 'perceiving.' Suddenly, he recalled the Abbot saying that anyone who had a problem could go to see him at any time, and he decided to walk to his preceptor's lodging. His footsteps woke the dogs, which ran up to him, barking loudly. Phra Buahyao had to wave them off.

"Somchai, Somchai, open the door, please," the new monk called to the lay attendant. The young man was unhappy at being disturbed. He was still sleepy as he opened the door.

"Venerable Brother, why do you come so late at night? I am sleeping," he said peevishly.

"Is Luang Poh sleeping?" Phra Buahyao asked instead of answering. The lay attendant glanced upstairs and said, "Maybe he is working, the light is on."

"Let me see him for just a minute, I have something important to tell him."

"I'll ask his permission. Actually, he doesn't allow anyone to meet him in his room except for special cases." Then he went upstairs to tell the Abbot.

"Is it Phra Buahyao who has come?" the Phra Khru asked him before he could speak.

"Yes, sir, he wants to speak to you."

"Tell him to wait at my seat." The Abbot continued with his writing, then after ten minutes had passed he came downstairs.

"What's the matter?" he asked his pupil.

"Sir, have you been sleeping?"

"Not yet. I have been so busy that I have had no time to sleep. I have not slept for several days."

"And do you not feel tired?" asked the new monk.

"No, because I have been mindful all the time. Remember that if you feel drowsy, you can get rid of it by focusing your mind on the center of your forehead and mentally reciting four or five times, 'drowsy.' Then it will disappear."

Phra Buahyao was going to speak, but the Abbot said, "You know, I am writing a handbook on vipassana meditation, and more than one hundred pages are finished now. But there are still about two hundred yet to be written. If I pass away, there will be a handbook for evaluating one's practice. No one has written this kind of book before. It will be very useful for practitioners."

"When will it be finished, sir?" asked the new monk.

"I don't know, but I am trying to finish it before I die. It isn't easy to write. Now then, let's talk about your business, because I want to get on with my writing," the Abbot said.

"Luang Poh, sir, I have attained 'perceiving'," Phra Buahyao reported with joy.

"Now then, how do you know this, or has someone told you?"

"Yes, sir, a beautiful voice has whispered in my ears."

"What did it say?"

"It said, 'You have succeeded. You have succeeded,' sir."

"Well," the Phra Khru said, smiling. Phra Buahyao was confused, for when the Abbot acted like this, it usually meant that there was something wrong.

"Was this voice the same as the one you heard last year?" asked the preceptor.

"No, sir, the voice last night was much more beautiful," replied the pupil.

"Then, what else did it say?" the Abbot inquired.

"It told me to wander wherever I wanted to. Just by wishing, I could go anywhere. I have visited heaven and hell. In hell I saw my father being punished by a guardian of the hell realms. I asked him to forgive my father,

but he said that he could not. He also told me that he couldn't even help his own mother-in-law."

"Oh, that is the same as I experienced. Once I visited hell and experienced what you have just told me."

Phra Buahyao smiled happily when he heard the Abbot's words. He said, "If that is so, then I really have succeeded."

"Who told you that? You have been tricked by 'Mara,' the Deceiver, just as I was tricked before," the Abbot said, and now the new monk felt his heart sink. He asked his preceptor softly, "What do you mean, sir? Does this mean that I have not really seen heaven and hell?"

"Yes, you have really seen, but what you have seen is not real. Do you understand?"

"No, sir. Please explain. I am very puzzled."

"I mean that you really have seen heaven and hell, but the heaven and hell you have seen are not real. It is said that both you and I have seen an unreal thing. It is unreal because it is only an illusion formed by our mind. We call it the 'Mara as a deity'. So I say that you have been deceived by Mara," the Abbot explained.

"If that is so, does it mean that heaven and hell do not exist?"

"Yes, they do exist. If you are a Buddhist, why do you not believe in heaven and hell? One day, if you have enough time, you must read the Pali Canon. It is in that cabinet." He pointed to a cabinet containing many books in blue bindings.

"Luang Poh, if it is true that heaven and hell really exist, then why have we seen an unreal thing?" The new monk was still puzzled.

Instead of answering, the Abbot asked him in turn, "Aren't you astonished that after practicing for only two days, you are able to see heaven and hell, while other people who have practiced for years cannot?"

"It depends on the nature of each person, sir," the new monk answered.

"That may be, but you must remember that what you see when you meditate can be proven as real or unreal."

"How, sir?"

"It is very easy. I will tell you. Whenever you are not mindful, you can be sure that what you see is unreal. But if you are mindful, it is real. To speak more simply, you must apply mindfulness in order to see it. Do you understand?"

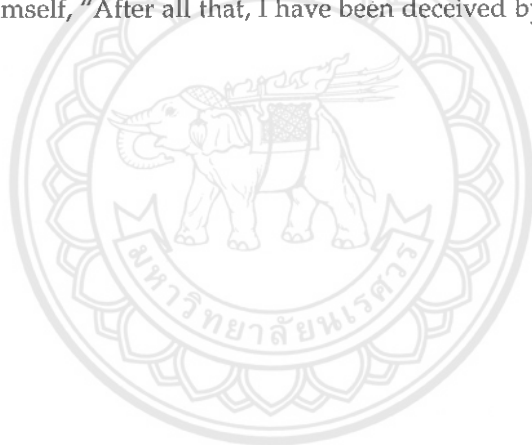
"Yes, sir. Luang Poh, you have spoken about 'Mara as a deity'. What is that, sir?"

"Well, this word 'Mara' means the Destroyer who destroys a person's

involvement in doing good, and vipassana meditation is considered to be the supreme good. Do not forget that there are three ways of doing good, or three ways of producing merit. These are by giving, by observing the precepts of ethical behavior, and by mental development. Of the three, the first one is considered ordinary, the second is better, and the third is the best.

“Whenever we do good, we always face Maras, or destroyers, of which there are five. They are the Mara of the defilements, the Mara of the aggregates, the Mara of karmic formations, the Mara as a deity and the Mara of death. Of the five, the Mara of death is the worst, because once you are dead you have no chance to practice walking or sitting meditation. Therefore, your duty is to be aware of these Maras, and to prevent them from influencing you. Remember that ‘without conquering the Maras, the perfections cannot be cultivated,’ so you must conquer them.”

The new monk walked back to his lodging with a feeling of despair. He said to himself, “After all that, I have been deceived by Mara. What a pity!”



Chapter 6

The following day, around 10 a.m., the Abbot was teaching Phra Buahyao and the three teachers from Nakhonswan the third stage of walking meditation when Somchai introduced a government Minister and his wife, a Lady (*khunyong*), accompanied by his retinue of ten policemen, ranking from major to colonel. One of them had the duty of carrying the Lady's handbag. It was a beautiful thing made of rattan, with a design of golden stripes. It was shaped like one of the areca nut baskets that Thai women used in earlier times, but smaller and more delicate. Whoever heard the price of this handbag would have been shocked, for the Lady had paid the mighty sum of two thousand baht. Such a sum of money could buy nearly twenty grams of gold at that time!

The Lady's jewelry bespoke a person of expensive tastes. If by chance she had spent this amount of money on having quarters built for monks, she would undoubtedly have been able to build ten or more. Her face was painted with cosmetics, with the purpose of making it beautiful, but she was unable to hide the wrinkles that revealed her age. Many people found the Lady arrogant and unfriendly. Mr. Boonmee took one glance at her and felt instant dislike. He said to himself, "What a pity! She can't even carry her own small handbag!"

The newcomers paid reverence to the Abbot. Phra Buahyao noticed that the lady could not make a five-point prostration. Mr. Boonmee noticed too, and disliked her even more.

"Good morning, Minister, how are you?" said the Phra Khru. He had seen this man frequently in newspapers and on television, and he knew his face well. It was rumored that he would become the next Prime Minister.

"I have heard of your fame for a long time," the Minister replied. "I happened to be in the area on business, so I am taking this opportunity to

speak to his wife, for he had been afraid of her ever since they were married. It was through his Lady that he had subsequently risen to power and fame.

"When Your Reverence says that it is no good, you mean that it will be unsuccessful, is that right, sir? But I am quite sure that it will have its result, just as the Lady has planned," the Minister said with assurance.

"That is why I say that it is no good. To speak directly, I would like to tell you that you will fail absolutely, because of your Lady."

The listener behind the closed door was about to cry out, so the Abbot spoke more loudly, "Don't scream, Lady. Be calm, be calm. Let me finish speaking first, and after that you can scream." At this, the Lady remained silent and tried to listen.

"But I have been rising these days, owing to my wife's support. She is very well known and has numerous contacts with powerful people in high places," the Minister said.

"True enough, but you have to realize that although the position of Prime Minister is the supreme position, in reality you will not be supreme, because your Lady is in a higher position than you. Do you understand what I mean? I am a forthright person, I do not like to speak indirectly."

"Yes, sir, I understand. Anyway, I still want to know, if I carry out the coup, can it succeed? Will you please tell me this?"

"To tell the truth, you will triumph, and you can become the Prime Minister as you wish."

The woman outside the door pondered, "Then why did you say that it is no good? What a queer person this monk is!" She was shocked to hear a voice from inside.

"I said that it is no good because you will be the Prime Minister for not more than two months. After that there will be a great uprising. The students will harass you so vigorously that you will not be able to remain in office any longer. Both you and your wife will be in agony. You should make the decision yourself whether you want to be a happy Minister or a miserable Prime Minister."

"If that is so, I will consult my wife first," said the Minister.

"No need. I can answer for her now that she wishes you to be Prime Minister since she does not believe what I have said." The Lady was amazed that the Abbot knew her thoughts. The Minister was upset, for he could not decide whom he should listen to, this monk or his wife. Finally, he chose the latter.

"In any case, if you don't believe what I have just told you, I shall give

you proof by describing your past. After that you can make up your mind whether to listen to your wife or to me."

Then the Phra Khru recounted the story of the Minister's previous political career, which had been dominated by his wife. The man in the room and the woman outside were dumbfounded, and conceded that the Abbot spoke only the truth. Faith was aroused in both of them. Yet, why had the Abbots at the six monasteries which they had visited that morning told them that it would be good? They hesitated: which should they believe, those six or this one?

The Abbot knew what they were thinking, so he said, "The monks you have asked this morning did not lie. Whoever you ask now will tell you the same thing. I also agree with them that it will be good, but it will be good only at the beginning. After that it will become bad.

"Please believe me. I am very sincere to everyone, and I never lead anyone astray. Last month a general came here asking for my help. He wanted to become the Prime Minister, and he sought my advice on how to conduct a coup. I knew that it was impossible, and I told him directly. His wife was very dissatisfied and left angrily." The Phra Khru did not mention that the general's wife had also been listening at the door. He did not want the Lady to think that he was criticizing her.

"Your reverence, could you find a way to help me, please?"

The Minister's question pleased the Lady, but the Abbot's answer upset her. He said, "If I could, I would without being asked. But I really cannot. According to the law of karma, no one can do that."

"Who creates the law of karma, sir?" asked the Minister. As a politician, he was experienced only in worldly affairs, but in terms of Dhamma he was nearly blind.

"The law of karma is the law of cause and effect. Whatever kind of cause there is, then the same kind of effect will result. From a good cause will come a good effect and from a bad cause will come a bad effect. We create our own karma. No one else can create it for us. This is not fate, but karma.

"When someone creates a cause, he will experience its effect. No one else can experience it for him. As the Buddha says: 'We are the owners of our karma, the heirs of our karma. Our karma is the womb from whence we have sprung. Our karma is our heritage. Our karma is our protection. Whatever action we take, good or evil, of that we shall be the heirs.'"

The Phra Khru could see that his listeners were beginning to appreciate the Dhamma, so he continued teaching:

"Whether one is born rich or poor, happy or unhappy, depends on one's karma. Karma means action. According to Buddhism, no action can be called karma unless it is associated with volition, or has volition as its foundation. Here volition means intention. The Buddha says, 'It is intention, or volition, or moral will, O monks, that I call karma. Having an intention, we perform actions through body, speech, and mind.'

"Karma is a profound subject. If you are interested, you may come and stay here for a week to discuss it. I have collected a number of examples of karma which have happened in this monastery. Some of them seem unbelievable. For instance, the monk who is sitting downstairs is one such case. He came here to expiate his karma. I am teaching him to practice vipassana meditation, according to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness." His listeners could not understand the meaning of this sentence.

"Where has he come from, sir?"

"From Kalasin. It is very peculiar, Minister. He told me that he had dreamed of this monastery, and that a voice mentioned my name as well as the monastery's. That voice commanded him to take ordination here for expiation. He was uncertain about it at first, but after he had dreamed the same dream three nights running, he became convinced of its significance, and he came here to test it. In fact, it was not a dream. It was what is called *nimitta*, which means a sign or vision. But he needs very badly to expiate his karma. I am determined to help him as much as I can. I feel sympathy for his sufferings."

"But you said that according to the law of karma, no one can help anyone else," the Minister objected.

"I mean that I will help him in so far as I am able, to guide him in his meditation. But as far as his karma is concerned, I certainly cannot do anything. He himself created the cause, so he will experience the effect."

"But Your Reverence, sir, why do evil-doers experience happiness? This happens often. Some people say, 'Since when do good actions bring good results? Many are the evil-doers who experience good.' Therefore, 'whoever does good experiences good, and whoever does evil experiences evil' is not true in all cases, is it, sir?"

"As I have said, karma is quite a sophisticated subject. We cannot judge only by the cases we have seen, for in principle 'the good doer must experience good, and the evil doer must experience evil.' In the case of someone who does evil but experiences good, this can be explained as the result of previous karma. Such a person is experiencing the result of good karma created in the past. This means that in a previous life that person had col-

lected good karma, which is still producing good results in this present existence, but when that person's good karma is exhausted, the bad karma will produce its results.

"In the case of someone who does good but experiences evil, that is because the results of past evil actions are not exhausted. Bad and good karma will not produce their results at the same time. If bad karma is manifesting its results, then the good karma will be latent, and if the good karma is producing its fruits, then the bad karma will be latent. Look at it this way: when you are sitting there, you are occupying a certain space, and no one can sit there but you. But when you leave, another person can sit there and occupy that space, isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Minister. The Lady behind the closed door also silently answered, "Yes, sir."

"Now then, if somebody tells you that 'Since when do good actions bring good results? Many are the evil-doers who experience good,' you must argue that doers of good certainly experience good, and no evil-doers experience good. You might say that evil-doers who experience good can be compared to charcoal with a fire hidden beneath. It will eventually grow red-hot later. This is a reasonable comparison, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. In that case, if we do no evil, we won't experience evil results. Is that right, sir?"

"Yes, and this is why the Buddha says:

'If you are afraid of and dislike pain, do no evil, either openly or in private. If you do or intend evil, there is no escape from pain, even if you run away or fly through the air.'

"You can see this in the case of Phra Maha Moggallana, who had the ability to fly through the air yet was still unable to escape from his karma. Have you ever heard his name? He was one of the two chief disciples of the Enlightened One, and was the foremost in psychic powers. He could fly through the air, but in the end he was killed by bandits. They crushed him until his bones were broken into small pieces, because in his previous life he had beaten his own parents. Even though he attained the ultimate liberation and became an Arahant, he still had to experience the result of his evil karma."

"But why didn't he escape by flying, sir?"

"He did. He flew away from those bandits more than ten times, but they kept following him, seeking a chance to kill him. Finally, recalling his past actions, he reflected to himself, 'I can escape from these bandits, but not from my karma.' For that reason, he finally let the bandits attack him."

"Did he die, sir?" asked the Minister attentively.

"If he had been an ordinary man, undoubtedly he would have been killed, but since he was truly an Arahant who had attained special powers, it was not possible for him to die in such a way. He used his powers to join his bones together again, then flew into the air to have an audience with the Buddha, and informed the Awakened One that he was going to the ultimate Nibbana. At the time of the Buddha, every Conqueror who was about to attain his final Nibbana would inform the Blessed One first, because otherwise he would be unable to do so."

The Abbot glanced at the clock hanging on the wall and said, "Please go and have lunch now. After that we shall continue our discussion. You do not have business anywhere else, do you?"

"No, sir, I intended to come here to consult you. I wanted to consult seven monks from seven monasteries, and you are the last one, sir. Having spoken to you, I feel that my eyes have been opened," said the Minister. The Lady outside the closed door hurried away before the Abbot could open it. A moment later the Minister appeared, following the Phra Khru down the stairs.

"Go and have your lunch," he told everyone who was sitting in the room downstairs. Phra Buahyao paid homage to his preceptor, then stood up and walked quietly toward the refectory, for he was afraid that the other monks would be waiting for him to join them before they would begin to eat.

"And your Reverence, you will not have lunch?" asked the Minister.

"I eat only once a day, except on special occasions, when I am invited to lunch by some of my devotees. On those days I eat twice."

Seeing the devoted life the Phra Khru led boosted the Minister's faith in the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan again. Most of the monks he had met could not arouse such faith in him, for they lived luxurious lives, sleeping in air-conditioned rooms, having their own cars and being greedy for gain. But most important was the fact that they were not able to teach the Dhamma as profoundly as this monk could.

Chapter 7

The lay attendant led the Minister and his retinue to the monastery's dining room, where the lay men and women were having the pre-midday meal. These people had come here to practice vipassana meditation. Some came alone, others in groups. Some were here for only a few days, while others remained longer. One man had intended to stay for seven days, but when the week had passed, he decided to stay on because of his enthusiasm for the Dhamma. After a while this upset his wife, who came to the monastery to fetch him home. There were also those who left early because they disliked "rising" and "falling", "right step" and "left step."

The taste of the food pleased the Lady very much. Although it looked plain and uninviting, she noticed how delicious it was. "This bamboo shoot curry is very tasty. Before cooking, do you boil the bamboo shoots?" she asked the cook.

"These are not bamboo shoots, they are coconut sprouts," the cook explained. "They look like bamboo shoots in shape and taste, so anybody who didn't know would take them for bamboo shoots." She did not know that the woman she was talking to was a Lady. The policeman who carried the Lady's handbag had to tell her, "Auntie, don't you know that this person is a Lady?"

"I beg your pardon, madam. I really didn't know. I am a peasant and uneducated. Please forgive me," said the old woman, paying respect to the Lady with folded palms.

"Never mind. Your meal was very nice. This fried fish and the lettuce soup are very tasty. Do you put seasoning powder in it?"

"No, madam, Luang Poh told us to add 'mindfulness' instead. He said that it is much better than seasoning powder."

“Add ‘mindfulness’? What does that mean?” The Lady did not understand.

“It means that he suggested that every monastery cook should practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness for a week, so that we can cook with mindfulness.” The Lady still did not understand what the woman was talking about. She had heard ‘mindfulness’ for the second time, but did not understand what it was. After finishing lunch she would ask the Phra Khru about this word. Being a Lady, she did not feel moved to ask the monastery cook.

“There are so many people. It must cost thousands of baht each day for food!” asked the Lady, glancing at the other people, who were all dressed in white.

“Yes, madam. It depends on the number of guests. We feed everyone who comes. Some days there are five hundred people, and we have to pay about three thousand baht. That is six baht a head. They eat only twice a day, because Luang Poh advises everyone to observe the Eight Precepts.”

“And where do the funds come from to pay for this?”

“From donations, madam. But sometimes, if there is no donor, Luang Poh would ...” She stopped speaking.

“Would what?” the Lady asked. The monastery cook stepped nearer and whispered, “Luang Poh would buy the food on credit, madam, and whenever he has money, he repays the debt.”

“What a pity! And those who stay here for long periods don’t help him? Does the monastery charge them any money?”

“No, madam. Luang Poh does not want to do that. He says that since they have come here to cultivate goodness, it is better that he supports them. To tell the truth, some of them do donate to the monastery now and again. But it is very funny that nowadays people must be paid to do good.”

The Minister’s retinue noticed that the lay devotees were eating in silence, so they naturally stopped talking themselves. In any case, the food was so delicious that they didn’t want to waste time on talking. After the main course, dessert was served. It was pounded rice with condiments and it was so tasty that the Lady called the monastery cook and said, “This pounded rice is excellent. Would you mind telling me how to prepare it?” Again the cook was overjoyed.

“It’s not difficult, madam, but it requires ‘tactics’.”

“What are tactics?” the Lady was puzzled.

“It’s an English word, madam. Have you never heard of it?”

“How do you spell it? Maybe I know it.”

"Oh, I can't. I'm illiterate, madam. I cannot read or write in either English or Thai."

"But how do you know this word?"

"I have heard it from other people, madam," she confessed.

"Maybe the word is 'technique,' Auntie," said one of the policemen.

"Oh, that's right, that's right," she agreed, then said to the Lady, "It requires 'technique,' madam."

"What technique? Will you tell me?"

"Why not? First, you must select the best pounded rice. That means the softest kind. You knead the rice with salted water, prepared by dissolving two spoonfuls of salt in three cups of water. Pour it on to the pounded rice little by little, while kneading. The method of kneading also requires technique."

"So many techniques!" the Lady interrupted.

"Yes, madam, otherwise it won't be good."

"All right, all right. And then?"

"Then, you leave it in a pot or a big bowl, covered with a lid. After that the condiments are prepared. You have to remember that everything concerned with the condiments requires cleanliness, otherwise they will go off very quickly." The cook felt tired after the explanation, for she had spoken quite loudly.

"Thank you very much. I've learned a lot here," said the Lady. She took a sip from a glass of water. "This drinking water is very nice. Is it rainwater?"

"Yes, madam. Luang Poh keeps it in tanks. There is a technique to this, too." Her listener said nothing, so she continued speaking. "When it rains the first time, we don't collect the water because the roof is still dusty. It is best to collect the water from the third or fourth rainfall, when the roof is clean," the old woman explained.

Apart from having a tasty lunch, the Lady also learned the techniques for preparing pounded rice with condiments, and for collecting rainwater. She felt much better, and she did not mind when her husband said that he wanted to continue his discussion with the Abbot, for she herself had begun to have faith in the monk. He had many more extraordinary abilities than any other monk she had known.

After lunch, the headmaster and his two friends went back to practice at the instruction hall. The Abbot told them to come to his quarters at 8 p.m., and he would instruct them in the fourth stage of walking meditation. The following day would be their last day, and he would teach them

the fifth and sixth stages. Thus, they would have learned six stages of walking meditation within three days. The Phra Khru was able to adapt to circumstances. He not only had the knowledge to impart but he could also judge the alertness of his students and tell how quickly they could learn.

The Minister and his retinue returned to the Abbot's quarters. The Phra Khru knew that today he had to tell the story of Madam Lamyai so he told the lay attendant to invite Phra Buahyao to be present.

"Don't you feel hungry, Your Reverence?" asked one of the policemen, who ate three meals a day but still had to have something more before bedtime.

"No, I am used to it," the Abbot replied. "When I was observing the Thirteen Austerities in Dong Phraya Yen Forest, I fasted for seven days and nights because there was nothing to eat, but I lived."

"Your Reverence, I... I am baffled by how you know what other people are thinking," the Lady said.

"I use 'perceiving'. Are you interested in this?"

"Yes, sir. How can I attain it?"

"You must pay proper attention when meditating. Practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, and when your mind becomes one-pointed, then it will arise automatically. Note that 'perceiving' has great value. We can use it to analyze the law of karma."

"If that is so, will you let me learn this skill? Are women allowed to learn it, sir?"

"Yes, both men and women can learn. All you need is a mind and a body. On the condition that you want to learn, you may attend class here in this monastery for at least seven days. After that you may continue your studies at home until you attain it. I would like to tell you the story of a person who attained 'perceiving'."

The Abbot began to recount the tale of Madam Lamyai.

"This person was named Madam Lamyai. She was the wife of a teacher named Wong. Their home was in Ang Thong Province. Mr. Wong was a teacher of morals, but he got drunk every day and he was also a womanizer. Madam Lamyai was a woman with a sharp tongue. She could scold like a searing flame, in spite of being illiterate. One day she came to see me and told me about her roving husband. I knew Mr. Wong very well. He came to this monastery very often. When Madam Lamyai finished, I asked if she wanted her husband to give up his playboy ways. If so, then she had to come here to practice vipassana meditation for one week. She came, and I instructed her in the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, but

she was unable to learn either walking or sitting meditation. She could not even differentiate between her left and right feet in walking meditation, and in sitting meditation she could feel neither 'rising' nor 'falling.'

"I almost lost patience, but I told her to come back the following day with one of her children. She brought her son. I recited to him the words for worshipping the Enlightened One, the Sacred Teaching, the Holy Order, the Resplendent Triumphs and the Victory and Benefit, then I told him to teach his mother to recite these, and when she had succeeded in reciting them by heart, she should come to see me. Her son taught her two sentences each day. One month later she came back and recited what I had assigned her. Every word was correct.

"I told her to recite the whole thing once through every day before going to bed, and then the words for worshipping the Enlightened One fifty-three times, once for every year of her age, plus one. At first she used tamarind seeds to help her keep track of the number, but when her mind became one-pointed, there was no longer any need to use them. As it became more focused, she could recite one hundred and eight times without using the tamarind seeds, just as when you no longer need the alarm clock to let you know how long you have practiced sitting meditation. As Madam Lamyai became more and more mindful, her mind developed automatically, and her behavior changed. She used to sell meat for a living, but she realized that this was a wrong livelihood," the Abbot said.

"How many kinds of trade are condemned as wrong livelihood?" he asked the Minister.

"I don't know, sir," was the answer.

"And you, Lady?"

"I don't know either. I know only one, which is to trade in flesh."

"Phra Buahyao, will you please answer this question?" the Abbot asked the new monk.

"Yes, sir. There are five. They are trade in weapons, in human beings, in flesh, in alcohol, and in poison," Phra Buahyao replied quickly and clearly.

"That is right. Now then, after that Madam Lamyai gave up selling meat, as well as harsh speech. She no longer scolded her husband or anyone else. Moreover, she was able to practice both sitting and walking meditation herself quite naturally, and did so for two hours every day. You see, if your mind becomes good, then everything else will be good, too.

"One day Mr. Wong told her that he was going to collect the rent from their farms in Chainat Province, but in fact he went to Nakhonswan Province to visit a widow whom he kept secretly as wife, and stayed with her

for four days. Before returning home, he gave her three hundred baht. Madam Lamyai wanted to know where her husband had gone, so she did some chanting and practiced one hour of walking meditation and one hour of sitting meditation. When her mind was concentrated, she willed herself to attain the 'divine eye,' for she wanted to know what her husband was doing and where. She then recited 'perceiving,' three times. At that moment she saw and knew all about her husband. Isn't this good, Lady? You must learn to attain 'perceiving,' then you can check on where the Minister goes," joked the Phra Khru.

"Yes, sir, I always wonder why he comes home very late at night. Maybe he has a secret wife somewhere," the Lady said, seizing the chance to tease her husband.

"I don't have a minor wife, sir," the Minister complained, "My wife always follows me everywhere, she never lets me out of her sight."

"Now then, let's continue the story of Madam Lamyai. When Mr. Wong came home, she pointed at his face but did not scold him, for she had given up harsh speech since taking up vipassana meditation. 'Where have you been?' she asked. Mr. Wong replied, 'I have been to collect the rent from our farms, like I told you.' 'And where is the money?' Mr. Wong hesitated before replying. 'They ... they requested a delay until next month.'

"Now Madam Lamyai had a chance to teach her husband. She said, 'Mr. Wong, you are a teacher of morals, but you yourself are immoral—you drink, womanize, and lie. I know that you did not go to Chainat. You went to visit your secret wife at Nakhonswan, and gave her three hundred baht, right?' Mr. Wong thought, 'How does she know? Maybe the Phra Khru knew and told her. Tomorrow I'll go to Wat Ambhavan to complain to him.' Mr. Wong blamed me quite falsely," the Abbot said with a smile.

"Madam Lamyai knew what her husband was thinking. She said, 'No need to go to Wat Ambhavan. Luang Poh didn't tell me, I knew by myself.' But Mr. Wong did not believe her. The following day he came to see me and asked, 'Luang Poh, did you tell my wife that I went to visit my secret wife?' I denied telling her. Finally he surrendered to his wife and gave up his misconduct in action as well as in his speech. Thus he became both a moral man and an honest husband. Do you agree that 'perceiving' has a great value?"

"Yes, sir, I agree," said the Minister.

"I am glad you agree. If not, I would stop telling my story.

"Later on, Madam Lamyai became seriously ill with cancer of the bowel. Her doctor said that she would die within a month. He let her hus-

band take her home, and although she was too weak to sit or walk, she continued practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness by meditating while lying down. She mindfully acknowledged the pain by reciting, 'pain, pain,' and she used mindfulness to combat it. When her mind became one-pointed, she determined that she did not want to die at that time. She wanted to see all her children finish their education and find jobs first.

"At her house there was a big bees' nest on the roof. One day, when all of her five children were sitting around her, she said to them, 'Children, please keep quiet and watch. I will transmit merit to those bees, and ask them to suck the poisonous cancer from me.' She closed her eyes, and after a while opened them and said, 'Dear bees, please help me. I am in great pain. Please suck the poison from my wound.' When she stopped speaking, a group of bees flew over to her and landed on her stomach, sucking poison, and then died.

"The next day, a large cobra came crawling toward her where she was lying in a small bed beneath her house. Her children were afraid that it would bite her, and were going to kill it when Madam Lamyai forbade them, and instead transmitted merit to the cobra. Then she said, 'Dear cobra, please help me by sucking the poison from my wound.' Then the snake slithered over to her stomach and began sucking, after which it crawled away about four or five meters and died. Madam Lamyai's children took it to bury in their garden. It is a very strange story. Reporters wanted to publish in the newspapers, but I did not let them, because if some readers did not believe it, this would not be good for me. The result was that Madam Lamyai was able to live three years longer, until all of her children found jobs. After that she died. Her body was cremated here," he said, pointing toward the crematorium behind the monastery.

"The day her body was cremated she also exercised her miraculous powers. I was not here, but they did not wait for me. They tried to light the funeral fire at 5 p.m., while I was still on my way back to the monastery. But the fire refused to ignite in spite of their continued efforts. At 7 p.m. I arrived and lit the fire. It caught immediately. I remembered her words before she died. She said, 'Luang Poh, you must light the fire at my funeral, otherwise I will not be burnt.'"

After the Abbot had finished, everyone was quiet for a while, then the Lady asked, "Your Reverence, suppose someone criticized you, would you be angry?"

"No, I don't want to hurt myself by doing that. One suffers by becoming angry, and someone who blames another must be wrong themselves."

“But if he asks for forgiveness, will he still be wrong?”

“Not if the person he criticized forgives him. But there are some actions that cannot be forgiven, such as the five deeds of extreme result—matricide, patricide, the murder of an Arahant, the wounding of a Buddha, and the creation of a schism in the Order. These five actions are unforgivable because they are deeds of extreme result. This is shown in the case of Phra Devadatta who committed the evil of wounding the Buddha. Though the Enlightened One forgave him for his fault, after death he was reborn in hell because he had committed two kinds of karma of extreme result; that is, apart from wounding the Buddha, he also caused dissension among the Order. To give another example, suppose a man killed his own mother and she forgave him with her last breath, still that son must be born in the abyss after he dies, because this kind of evil is so strong that it is unforgivable.”

The Lady became afraid, for she had criticized the Abbot in her mind. Finally, she decided to confess.

“Your Reverence, I mentally criticized you this morning. Please forgive me,” she prostrated to the Abbot three times when she had finished speaking.

“I forgave you this morning. However, I would like to praise you for your courage. It is hard to find a person who does wrong and dares to confess the error. I sincerely praise you.” The Lady was so delighted that her eyes filled with tears.

That day, the Minister and his retinue left the monastery at dusk. The Lady had donated twenty thousand baht to the Abbot to buy food for the people staying there. That amount of money could buy 187 grams of gold!

Chapter 8

The Minister and his retinue had gone. Phra Buahyao, having sat peacefully listening to the story of Madam Lamyai from beginning to end, asked, "Luang Poh, that Lady doesn't even know how to make a five-point prostration, so how was she able to become a Lady?"

The Phra Khru gazed at his questioner's face, smiled his charming smile, and said, "You ask strange questions. I notice that you always ask me questions of this kind."

"That is because I want to know, sir," the pupil replied ingenuously.

"Why do you want to know?" Sometimes the Abbot found it entertaining to tease people who were fond of asking questions.

"I want to know to increase my knowledge, sir."

"I see. In that case, I will tell you so that I will gain merit."

"Yes, sir, I am sure you will gain quite a lot of it."

"Eh ... I have forgotten what you asked. What was your question?"

"Your memory has degenerated, sir. That shows that you have grown old," the pupil retorted. "But you haven't answered how a person who doesn't know how to make a five-point prostration can become a Lady."

"And why a person who knows cannot become a Lady? Being a Lady is not measured by the ability to make a five-point prostration. In order to become a Lady, one must receive the title from His Majesty the King."

The new monk did not understand, for he did not know what titles were, so he changed the subject by saying, "It seems to me that the Lady always browbeats her husband, and she has no manners. She was behind the closed door while you were talking to the Minister upstairs. Somchai told her to come down, but she disobeyed him. If she were my wife, I would beat her like this ... " The monk lifted his right hand and swept it to and fro in the air. The Abbot said nothing, so he went on, " ... That Minister seems

to be terrified of his wife, he has lost his manhood."

At this, the Phra Khru lost his patience. He said, "Now then, who will browbeat whom and who will be afraid of whom is really their own affair. It is not necessary for you to be troubled with other people's business."

"I am not troubled, but it is not right. That Minister is a big man, both in size and in status. There is no need to fear such a small woman."

"Well, Buahyao ..." This time the Phra Khru spoke seriously. "A true meditator should not be interested in other people's affairs. In the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, there is no part which guides us to be concerned with external objects, because body, feelings, thoughts and ideas are all within ourselves. Now then, I am going to explain mindfulness regarding thoughts, which is the third part of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. What are the first two?" the Abbot asked, testing his pupil's memory.

"Mindfulness regarding the body and mindfulness regarding feelings, sir."

"Have you understood them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, this time we'll look into the third one. What you are thinking about and talking about now is not related to mindfulness regarding thoughts, because your mind is concerned with external objects. I mean that you are not controlling your mind, but letting it wander in useless ways. A good meditator will not focus outside his body, or criticize other people. His duty is to be mindful at all times, and to realize what is happening in his body, feelings, thoughts, and ideas, and not to be interested in external objects. Keep this in mind."

"Luang Poh, I understand mindfulness regarding the body and feelings, but thoughts I cannot understand, sir. Will you please clarify it?"

"I am going to. Listen carefully. Mindfulness regarding thoughts in principle means that one recognizes a greedy thought as a greedy thought and a thought without greed as a thought without greed. One recognizes a thought with hatred and a thought without hatred, a deluded thought and an undeluded thought. One knows a thought with concentration from a distracted thought, a developed thought from an immature thought. One recognizes a thought which has some mental state that is superior to it and a thought which has no mental state superior to it, a mindful thought and an unmindful thought, a thought that is free and a thought that is not free.

"If, when you are practicing walking or sitting meditation, your mind is not concentrated, you must know at that time that your thoughts are not mindful, and you should try to use your sati or mindfulness, to bring them

to awareness. To put it simply, you should be mindful all the time. The Buddha's teachings, of which there are eighty-four thousand individual instructions, may be summarized into one, and that is 'mindfulness'. The last instruction that the Enlightened One gave to Phra Ananda and the five hundred monks also concerns mindfulness. Do you know what the Buddha's last instruction was?" the Abbot asked his pupil.

"No, sir. You know very well that I don't know, but you mean to make me lose face," Phra Buahyao complained.

"No," said the teacher, "I am just giving you a chance to speak, otherwise you might blame me for monopolizing the conversation."

"Please go ahead. I want to monopolize the listening."

"All right, continue listening. The last instruction of the Buddha was, 'O monks! Now, I, the Tathagata, urge you: transient are all arisen things. For your own benefit, and for the benefit of others, strive ardently!'

"This is the Buddha's last exhortation, because he said no more after these words. Now, do you see that all the teachings he gave for forty-five years ended in 'mindfulness'?"

"There is no word concerning 'mindfulness' in these sentences, sir," argued the monk, who was practiced in memorizing, but not in thinking.

"Really? 'Strive ardently!' Does this not mean 'mindfulness'? The Buddha instructed that his disciples should rise at four to practice walking and sitting meditation; that is, to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. This is regarded as a monk's duty. Can you tell me what a monk's duties are?"

"I ... I don't know, sir. You haven't taught me, and Phra Maha Boon taught me only the ten rules of daily religious observances before I received ordination: to attend the special meetings of the Order on *uposatha* days; to go out for alms; to chant scriptures; to sweep the monastery grounds; to maintain the three robes of a *bhikkhu*; to observe the probation; to shave the head and beard and to cut the nails; to study the disciplinary rules and to minister to the teacher's needs; to teach; and to contemplate on the four reflections. Are these what you are asking me about, sir?"

The teacher replied, "What you have enumerated are the details, but the chief duties of a monk are to study, to practice and to teach the Dhamma. To study means to learn how to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. When you know how, then you begin to practice, and after that you can instruct lay followers in the practice."

"As you are doing now, is that right, sir?"

"Yes, because I am a son of the Tathagata. I have to apply what he has

taught, and so do you. The Enlightened One was once living among the Kurus, at Kammasadamma, a market town of the Kuru people. There he taught the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. From that day on the Kurus admired practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness so much that they would use this practice to greet each other in daily life. For example, when they met a friend, they would greet them with, 'Friend, have you practiced the Four Foundations of Mindfulness?' rather than 'Good morning. How are you?' And if that person replied, 'Yes, sir. I am practicing now,' then they would salute him with joined palms over their head. and say, 'Well done! Congratulations!' But if that person replied, 'Oh no, I haven't practiced yet,' then they would say, 'Go away, go away.' Thus those who had not been practicing would be eager to practice, for their own happiness.

"As the Kuru people were all practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, that small town became more and more prosperous, and was rich in grain, as the rains came at the right time of year. When the Buddha knew of this, he prophesied that in the future this town would become a large and prosperous city. It is now known as New Delhi, the capital of India. Now do you realize that practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness brings many benefits?"

"Yes, sir, and I intend to do my best at it."

"Now then, go back to your lodging and practice walking meditation for one and a half hours, and sitting meditation for a similar time. When you lie down, do not forget to recite, 'rising' and 'falling' until you fall asleep. Try to notice whether you fall asleep at the moment of rising or of falling. Have you noticed?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Never mind, try again tonight. When you notice it, come and tell me immediately. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, and tonight will I have to come at 8 p.m. for an interview? It's nearly eight now."

"No, you can go and practice until bedtime. Tomorrow at 4 a.m. you must wake up and practice. You may feel tired, but force yourself to practice. Cultivating goodness requires pushing oneself for success. Now then, you may go. Tonight I shall instruct those three teachers on how to practice the fourth stage of walking meditation, as tomorrow will be the last day of their stay here."

"And you will teach them the fifth and sixth stages tomorrow, sir?"

"I think so, but first I must examine their capacity, to see whether they can grasp it or not. The headmaster seems to have ability, but I am not sure

of the other two. For you, one stage a day is enough. You should practice gradually, as you have to stay here for a long time," explained the Phra Khru so that Phra Buahyao would not feel that his teacher preferred others to him.

"I will leave now, so I can bathe and chant before practicing."

"Go and strive. Don't forget that only by exerting yourself can you put an end to suffering."

The new monk went to his lodging, and the Phra Khru walked upstairs, then bathed. It was twenty minutes to eight, and the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan spent those twenty minutes writing his Buddhist Manual for Vipassana Meditation Practice, which he had begun the year before. It would take two or three more years to finish. Some days when he was very busy he had no time, not just to write, but even to eat or sleep. That was why his health was not so good. Though his mind was free from hunger or distraction, his body was still subject to the laws of nature, so it was wearing out more quickly than bodies well cared for.

The headmaster and his two friends arrived at the Abbot's lodging at eight on the dot. The Phra Khru questioned them one by one on their practice. After that he instructed them in the practice of the fourth stage of walking meditation, which consists of four movements: 'heel up,' 'lifting,' 'moving,' and 'treading.' When the three teachers could do it correctly, the Abbot let them continue their practice at the instruction hall. The Phra Khru was about to go and continue his writing upstairs when Somchai came in and told him that two guests had asked permission to meet him. When he gave his consent, a man and a woman entered, walking on their knees toward him, each holding an offering tray, one bearing the three robes of a bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk, and one bearing flowers, candles, and incense-sticks. Each stood the tray on its pedestal and paid homage to the Abbot by making a five-point prostration, then sat respectfully to one side.

"Good evening," the Phra Khru greeted them. "Why have you come at night like this?"

"I drove here, sir. I brought my wife to learn how to practice vipassana meditation," the man replied.

"I see. How many days will she stay?"

"She won't, sir. She wants to practice at home. I have already instructed her in walking and sitting. I think she can practice at home, and if there is any problem, we will come to consult you, sir," the husband answered. The Abbot recognized him as a man who had come to practice the previous year. Since then, he had returned a few times.

"As you like. But if you have the chance, it is much better to stay here for a week. When you practice at home you are unable to sustain your mindfulness, as there are always sense objects distracting your mind."

"Yes sir, I hope to get that chance." This time it was the wife who spoke. "I'll just wait for my youngest daughter to grow up a little bit. Now she is only three years and five months old."

"As you say. Some people have come to stay even though their children were still very young. One of my pupils is a lecturer in Bangkok. The first time she came here her son was only four months old, and she stayed for the whole week. She is a very hard-hearted lady. She told me, 'Luang Poh, I won't let my child be an obstacle to my cultivating goodness as others have done.' Nowadays she comes quite often."

"Might she be that attractive little lady, sir? I have seen her here many times. She is about twenty years old. It's quite unbelievable that she has a child, since she looks so young."

"She is more than thirty but looks younger than her age. Be careful of admiring another woman in front of your wife. You may get seriously pinched when I turn my back," the Abbot joked.

"I am used to this, sir. He always admires other children and wives, but criticizes his own," the wife said, with an edge to her voice.

Seeing the situation deteriorating, the Abbot quickly said, "It's the nature of every man to be like this. Don't take it too seriously. It's agreed you will practice at home. I approve of your intention. You can practice gradually in your daily life. It is just like collecting academic credits at home," the Abbot said, sounding quite modern.

Having completed the ceremony of initiating the disciple-teacher relationship, the couple presented the articles they had brought to the Abbot, paid homage, and said good-bye.

"Wait, don't go yet. I want you to see something. There, they are coming." The Abbot pointed to a large group of men and women who were approaching his quarters. The leader carried a big, gold-colored offering tray with both hands. Without bothering to pay reverence, the newcomers hastily took off all their jewelry and put it on the tray, which the leader then placed in front of the Phra Khru. The husband and wife thought, "Oh, dear. We offered only the Triple Robe, but these people have much more faith. They are offering their own valuable jewelry. What devout people they are!"

Having put their valuables on the tray, the people exhorted the Phra Khru to bless them. The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan did as they asked. He closed his eyes and said the mystic formula, blowing three times on the

tray, then opened his eyes and said, "It's finished. I have blessed them."

The moment the Abbot finished speaking, the visitors picked up their jewelry and said good-bye, not forgetting to take the empty tray, for they had to go to other monasteries and seek the blessings of Abbots there for their valuables.

When they had left, the Phra Khru shook his head and said, "These people! I ask them to practice vipassana meditation, but they refuse. They only want the protection of an incantation. They prefer the false to the true," he said with a smile.

"But why don't you explain that to them, sir?" asked the husband.

"They wouldn't understand. They can only think at that level. It depends on each person's karma. The Enlightened One taught, 'It is by karma that all sentient beings are divided into noble or base.' If everyone could understand everything equally, then this world would not be so disorganized."

"Luang Poh, is it true that after being blessed, a thing becomes potent?"

"How could it be? It is a false belief. But I cannot make that group of people grasp the right view. If we consider the four kinds of people, we would have to say that they belong to the *padaparama* or idiot type. It is useless to teach these people, for their intellect is so limited that they can cling only to false beliefs."

"These are the people that the Buddha compared to the lotus growing in the mud beneath the water, is that right, sir?"

"Yes, and it will eventually be the food of turtles and fish. Now you must remember this case, to remind yourself not to do as they do."

"Yes, sir. To tell the truth, I used to be like that, but I changed when I became your disciple. It is because of your virtue," said the man.

"No, it is your own virtue, not mine. Otherwise that group of people would respond as you do. It depends on each person's karma."

"Yes, sir," the husband agreed. "Luang Poh, my wife and I are going to leave you to your rest now, sir."

"Now then, I wish you both happiness. Keep on practicing, as you have no refuge except yourself. If you have time, don't forget to come and stay here for a week." The last sentence he addressed to the wife.

"Yes, sir," she replied. It was nearly midnight when the couple left the monastery.

Chapter 9

The sound of the monastery bell had faded away since just after 4 a.m., but the dogs' howling seemed to be non-stop: whenever one ceased, another began. They had taken turns at howling for the past hour. The headmaster, who was practicing walking meditation, tried many times to recite, "sound," but still he felt irritated. It was strange that they were howling more mournfully than usual. "Perhaps they know that today is an observance day," he thought. Having practiced walking meditation for an hour, he was going to practice sitting meditation when an elderly monk approached him.

Although the 40-watt light bulb was not as bright as a neon tube, it was sufficient to show clearly that the monk was about seventy years of age, very thin and unhealthy, and wore old, torn robes. It seemed as if he were wearing rags. The old monk walked erect, his eyes fixed on the headmaster's face, and when he came nearer, Mr. Srist noticed that he was not walking, but rather floating above the floor. His mindfulness told him immediately that what he was seeing came from another state of existence.

Turning to the two teachers, he saw that they were just beginning to practice walking meditation. They had been reluctant to get up and had also dallied over washing their faces and brushing their teeth. Seeing that his friends had woken, his fear abated, but to make sure that what he was seeing was no hallucination, Mr. Srist recited, "seeing," three times. The monk was still there. So the headmaster gathered his mindfulness and asked, "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I am a monk of this monastery. They called me 'Luang Ta Fueng,'" the old monk replied in a clear, deep voice.

"But why aren't you at the special gathering of the Order, as today is uposatha day?"

“Don’t be frightened, I did not come to harm you. I died ten years ago, but I am still here.”

A cold wave of fear swept over the listener as he heard the old monk’s words. Since the monk had assured him that he meant no harm, however, the headmaster felt safe, so he asked, “Why have you come here?”

“To ask for offerings. I am in a difficult situation. For these ten years I have been cold and starving. Please tell Venerable Phra Khru that I need a Triple Robe. Please offer one to me. And when you finish practicing, then please transmit your merits to Luang Ta Fueng of Wat Ambhavan, so that I will be reborn in a happy birth. I have been here for ten years in order to expiate my evil karma.”

“When you were alive, didn’t you practice vipassana meditation? Is that why you are in this state?”

“No, I was a stubborn man. The Phra Khru told me about the benefits of practicing, but I didn’t believe him. I was too proud. That is why I became a hungry ghost.”

“A hungry ghost? But you don’t look anything like what my mother described to me when I was a child. She told me that hungry ghosts have long, thin bodies, as tall as palm trees, with mouths as small as the eye of a needle, and hands as big as palm leaves. Did she deceive me?”

“No, she didn’t. There are many kinds of hungry ghost. I am of that type who live on what others offer. That is why I came to ask for your help. Please have compassion on me.” His voice was full of yearning.

“If that is so, I will transmit my merits to you every time I finish practicing. Your name is Luang Ta Fueng, is that right?”

“Yes. Thank you very much for your kindness. May you practice attentively, for this is the best path for human beings. I still regret the time that I wasted in sensual pleasures and in being heedless in my last life. That heedlessness put me into the hardship I suffer now, and it cannot be undone. Don’t do as I have done. If I am born as a human being again, I will practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness all my life. I will never be careless again. I am now humbled. It is time to go, good-bye.”

With that, the figure floated away and disappeared into the shadows of the dawn. The dogs who had been barking and howling since 4 a.m. ceased instantly, as if on cue.

“Do you have a fever? Why have you been talking to yourself like that?” asked Mr. Boonmee, astonished.

“I have been talking to Luang Ta Fueng. Didn’t you see him, the old monk who was here?”

"I saw nothing. Ask Mr. Aroon if you don't believe me."

"Yes, sir, I saw you talking alone for quite a while. Do you have a fever, sir?" Mr. Aroon asked with concern.

"No, no, I am well. I want to meet Luang Poh for a few minutes. Please come with me."

Mr. Boonmee looked at his watch and said, "It's only 5:30. There is half an hour left before he will return from the Uposatha Hall. Let's practice to pass the time."

"But both of you were annoyed by the howling dogs, weren't you? They stopped only just now. What made them bark and howl for nearly an hour?" the headmaster grumbled.

"What are you talking about? They barked only when the bell rang at 4 a.m., and they stopped about five minutes later. You don't seem yourself this morning. Perhaps you don't want to go back home today, is that it?" Mr. Boonmee teased.

The headmaster decided not to tell his two friends what had happened to him, for they would think that he had gone mad. He thought that it would be better to report it to the Abbot.

"Well, will you come to the Abbot's lodging with me?" he asked.

"All right. We'll practice sitting meditation there," said Mr. Aroon.

The three teachers walked toward the Abbot's quarters. It was quite cold outside, but the headmaster's heart was as hot as if there were a great bonfire in his chest. He wanted to meet the Phra Khru as quickly as he could.

Having finished the ceremony in the Uposatha Hall, the Phra Khru walked back to his quarters before going out for alms. He was surprised when he saw the three teachers sitting inside, and thought that they had come to say good-bye. He invited them to stay and have breakfast before leaving.

"We haven't come to say good-bye, sir," explained Mr. Srist, "but I have a problem to ask you about. I beg your pardon for disturbing you so early."

"What is the problem? You look very worried. Are you all right?" asked the Abbot.

Instead of answering, Mr. Srist asked, "Luang Poh, is there a monk named Luang Ta Fueng in this monastery?"

The Phra Khru was silent for a while, then he replied, "Yes, but he passed away a long time ago. He was a sergeant-major of police, and took ordination here after retiring. Did you know him?"

“No, sir, but he came to meet me this morning at about 5 a.m., and introduced himself as Luang Ta Fueng.” Then he described what had happened an hour before.

When he had finished speaking, the Abbot said, “It’s a shame that a monk has to ask for offerings from a layman. Do you see from this that monks can be born in evil states if they are careless? Luang Ta Fueng was a very obstinate monk. I urged him not to do evil, but he ignored me. Finally he was reborn after his death in the ghost realm, because of his evil actions. You ought to have asked him why he wanted you to ask me for the Triple Robe. Why didn’t he ask me himself?”

“I wanted to, sir, but I don’t know why I forgot to ask. Maybe because I was frightened, sir.”

“He must have known that I had been offered the Triple Robe last night. So he asked you to beg for him. He is quite shrewd,” the Phra Khru said with a smile. “Now then, you go back and practice at the instruction hall until breakfast time. After breakfast, come and see me here. I am going out for alms. We’ll discuss this matter again,” said the Abbot. Then he went out for alms, followed by his lay attendant, who had a tiffin carrier in his left hand.

The three teachers returned to their residence at the instruction hall. No one mentioned Luang Ta Fueng, because they were afraid he might appear again. It was still dark, the sun not yet having risen, and non-human beings could appear at such times.

The Phra Khru had just finished his breakfast when the headmaster and his two friends came. Each of them had a bag containing his clothes, indicating that they were ready to go.

“Stay here for one more night,” the Abbot said, teasing them.

“We can’t, sir,” they answered with one voice.

“Why not? Maybe you would get a good lottery number. Luang Ta Fueng could give it to you.” At this, Mr. Boonmee and Mr. Aroon seemed to be interested. “I want a lottery number, but I’m afraid that I would be so frightened I would die first, sir,” said Mr. Boonmee.

“Luang Poh, have you decided to offer the Triple Robe to Luang Ta Fueng, sir?” the headmaster asked, since he was not sure if he could fulfill the promise that he had made.

“Oh, I nearly forgot. Please understand that I will give you the Triple Robe to offer to any monk who practices vipassana meditation. If he is not a practitioner, please do not offer it to him.”

“Why do you stipulate that only a practicing monk should receive it,

sir?"

"Because he will be able to transmit his merit to Luang Ta Fueng. If you offer it to a non-practicing monk, Luang Ta Fueng won't receive this merit. Some monks don't even know how to transmit merit to other beings. Luang Ta Fueng didn't, either. He had been a monk for ten years, and when he was invited to give a sermon, he just moved his lips, pretending that he was preaching. But don't talk to anyone about this kind of monk. There are many of them," the Phra Khru said, smiling. Then he picked up the Triple Robe and handed it to the headmaster.

"No need to wrap it, you will be offering it in a few minutes," he told Mr. Srist. He knew that the teachers would soon meet a wandering meditation monk. His 'perceiving' had told him so.

"Now then, I will help you by transmitting my merits to Luang Ta Fueng, so that he will be reborn in a happy state very soon. If you hadn't told me, then I wouldn't have known that he had been reborn as a hungry ghost."

"You have attained 'perceiving.' Why don't you know, sir?" Mr. Aroon asked doubtfully.

"It is obvious that you don't clearly understand 'perceiving.' I am glad that you asked, since it gives me the chance to explain it to you. It is true that I have attained 'perceiving,' but that doesn't mean that I 'perceive' all the time. If I were to do that, then things would certainly become very confused. I would be so busy with perceiving this person doing this and that person doing that, I would never have time to do anything else. Remember that we can perceive when we concentrate the mind. For example, while I am talking to you, I can see you only as well as other people can. If I want to know what you are thinking, then I must concentrate my mind in order to attain 'perceiving.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," the teacher replied. "Luang Poh, can everyone who practices the Four Foundations of Mindfulness attain 'perceiving'?"

"No, not all. Only some can. Can all students who complete a bachelor's degree achieve honors?"

"Not all, sir. Only some can," Mr. Aroon answered.

"In the same way, whoever practices the Four Foundations of Mindfulness may or may not attain 'perceiving,' because it is not the final goal of practice. It is only a by-product. In the time of the Buddha, there was a nun named Upalavanna. She was an Arahant, and was foremost among the Buddha's disciples in psychic powers, along with Phra Moggallana. Yet she was raped by a young man named Nanda because of

her past karma. In her previous life she had committed evil deeds, and she suffered the consequence. People were puzzled that she had been raped even though she had attained many special powers, but at the time she had not yet concentrated her mind, so she was unable to use her powers.

"It is mentioned in the commentary to the scriptures that the day she was raped, she had just come indoors. Being tired, she went to lie down. Nanda, who had hidden under the bed, took the opportunity to rape her. After that he was swallowed by the earth because of his evil karma. Do you see that without concentrating the mind, psychic powers cannot be?"

"In the same way, since I had forgotten Luang Ta Fueng and he did not manifest himself to me, we did not encounter each other. Anyway, you say he was reborn as a hungry ghost?"

"Yes, sir, he said that he was one of the type of hungry ghosts who survive on the offerings of others. How many kinds are there, sir?"

"There are four: those who live on the offerings of others, those who are tortured by hunger, those who are tortured by burning fire, and the demonic hungry ghosts. Which kind do you want to be reborn as?" the Abbot asked Mr. Aroon.

"None, sir," replied the youngest of the three teachers.

"What karma leads one to become a hungry ghost, sir?" asked Mr. Boonmee.

"Greed. Someone with a greedy mind will be reborn as a hungry ghost. Luang Ta Fueng always stole things from the monastery to take to his dwelling. He was greedy. According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha said that for anyone who dies in a greedy state of mind, one of two destinies await: rebirth in the realm of the hungry ghosts, or in the host of demons.

"For that reason you should remember that when you are dying, you must try to rid your mind of defilements, then you will be reborn in a happy state. If your mind is contaminated by defilements, then you will be reborn in states of misery. If your mind is occupied with greed, then you will find rebirth in the realm of hungry ghosts or of demons; if with hatred, you will be reborn in hell; and if with delusion, you will be reborn as a beast. If you should know that you are about to die, try to free your mind from these impurities. I have a true story to tell, do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, sir," answered the three teachers.

"Now then, there was a monk who was the district dean. I do not want to mention his name, for he has since died. This monk had amassed hundreds of Triple Robes, and kept them in cupboards in his lodgings. He was very possessive of them, and never gave them away to anybody, as he

Chapter 10

Late in the afternoon of the eighth day after his ordination, Phra Buahyao was walking to the Abbot's quarters for an interview when a new cream-colored van zoomed in through the monastery gate, followed by a blue car. The two vehicles stopped beside each other in the car park. Two men and three women got out. The new monk did not notice who came from which vehicle, but one thing he was sure of was that it was the headmaster who was walking in front of the four others, leading them to the Phra Khru's lodging. They got there a few minutes before him.

When he arrived and paid obeisance to the Abbot, the headmaster introduced him to the four others by saying, "This is Venerable Phra Buahyao, my teacher," so they as well as the headmaster bowed to him. The new monk felt both hot and cold that a man of middle age should praise him this way. Moreover, the two young ladies who accompanied Mr. Srist were so beautiful they made him feel shy.

"Good afternoon. How are you? Aren't Mr. Aroon and Mr. Boonmee accompanying you?" the Abbot greeted them. He was good at remembering people's names.

"No, sir. It is term time now. I took leave to bring my family here to pay homage to you." Then he introduced them, one by one.

"Phongphak, my wife, and these three are our children: Phongphan, the eldest, Wonwilai, the second, and Chaijana, the boy, is the youngest. They have all completed their education, and now have jobs."

The Abbot used 'perceiving' in considering the four people, and said, "This one is very intelligent. She will finish her doctorate." He pointed to Wonwilai. The young lady smiled shyly, joined her palms over her nose and said, "Sadhu, I hope your blessings come true."

The new monk thought to himself, "Oh, she is not only pretty, but she

also has a beautiful, clear voice. She is highly educated, too. Her sister is just as charming as she is. Suppose I had to choose one of them. It would be very difficult because if I chose the older one, I would miss the younger, but if I chose the younger one, I would have to pass up the older. What to do?"

The Abbot discerned his pupil's thoughts and knew that he was becoming confused, so he said, "You see, Buahyao, I told you that the headmaster would come back within a week, and now here he is."

"But you said that he would win the first prize in the lottery," the new monk said.

At this, the headmaster exclaimed, "It's true, sir! I was about to tell you."

The preceptor glanced at his pupil as if to say, "You see, what I have said is true."

"I want to thank you very much for helping to bring me good luck," the headmaster said, and prostrated to the Phra Khru three times in gratitude.

"It was not because of me. It is your own good fortune. I only knew you would win, and whether I knew or not, you would have done so because of your own good-karma. One of my disciples never bought lottery tickets, either legally or illegally, but he won the first prize in a lottery. It happened like this: a drunkard asked him to buy a ticket from him, because he wanted money to buy alcohol. My disciple refused, but the alcoholic begged him until he found it unbearable, so he reluctantly bought a ticket, and won that same evening. He felt grateful to the drunken man, and decided to share the money with him. But when he looked for him, he discovered that he had died. He was so upset about missing out on the great fortune that he had a heart attack."

When the Abbot finished speaking, the elder daughter of Mr. Srist asked, "In a case like that, had your disciple done wrong, sir?"

"No, because he had no selfish intention. He only bought the ticket because he was annoyed by the drunkard. In fact, he had no greed in his mind."

"It reminds me of a man I knew, sir," exclaimed the headmaster's son. "He won the first prize in the lottery, and went out and bought a car and married the most beautiful girl in the village, though he already had a wife. On top of that, he carried on outrageously, squandering his wealth, indulging himself with drink, young girls, gambling and so forth. Within a month he had crashed his car into a logging truck and died instantly."

"That is what is called 'a gift of suffering,' through not understanding the law of karma. He did not realize that he had become rich because of the good actions he did in the past. As a result, instead of maintaining his good karma, he destroyed it by violating the Five Precepts, so he was himself destroyed."

"That means that every man who takes a minor wife will meet his downfall, does it, sir?" asked Phongphak.

"I think so. What do you think?" the Abbot asked Mr. Srist.

"I don't know, sir. I only know that Phongphak is a jealous wife. That is why she is asking you. She is afraid that I will take a minor wife," complained the headmaster.

"Every woman is a jealous wife. The only difference is in degree," said the Abbot.

"Sir, you are not a woman, so how can you know that every woman is a jealous wife?" Wonwilai asked.

"And you are not me, so how can you know what I do not know?" the Phra Khru retorted with a smile. The young woman did not know how to answer, so she turned to the new monk for support.

"Maybe she has attained 'perceiving,' sir," said Phra Buahyao, intending to help the young lady. However, this only her feel puzzled. The Phra Khru sense that things were getting out hand, so he returned to the previous topic.

"Now then, will you spend your life like the man your son mentioned? It is an interesting way to go, isn't it?" the Abbot asked the headmaster teasingly.

"No, sir, I am a religious man. I could not do that. My family and I are sharing the money; each gets one hundred thousand baht. I told my wife and children that you have to go anywhere you are invited. If you had a vehicle, it would be more convenient for you, so I decided to buy you a van, and they are sharing the cost with me. There is also twenty thousand extra for fuel," said the headmaster. He presented the car's registration papers and keys to the Abbot. The Phra Khru accepted them and blessed him and his family.

"You have to find a driver now, sir," remarked his benefactor.

"I think Somchai can drive, but he doesn't have a driver's license."

"It is not difficult to get, sir, except in Bangkok. In other provinces, driver's licenses are readily granted. Almost all of my friends have one, even though some of them don't know how to drive," said Chaijana.

"But that is not right. It could endanger their lives as well as those of

others," Wonwilai commented.

Phongphan agreed. "That's true. One of my friends was killed horribly while she was making a phone call from a public telephone booth by the side of the road. I was talking to her on the telephone at the time. Suddenly a car crashed into the booth. The impact was so great that the booth was smashed into pieces and the broken glass went right through my friend's neck, severing her head from her shoulders. The driver was also killed instantly. I was very surprised when I heard a loud noise and my friend's voice suddenly disappeared. I got straight into my car to go and search for her, as she had told me where she was calling from. I was shocked by her terrible condition.

"According to the police, the woman driving the car was a new driver. Moreover, she had just had a serious quarrel with her husband, and had drunk too much alcohol. Then she took his car and drove away. Being drunk, she drove so fast and recklessly that she caused my innocent friend to share in her evil end." She spoke breathlessly, as if she were still upset by the accident.

The new monk was so enthralled by the sound of her voice that he gazed at her pretty face raptly, without blinking. When she finished her story, he even asked a stupid question.

"And who would be responsible for this accident, since the culprit was dead?"

"Well then, Phra Buahyao must be held responsible for it," said the Abbot soberly.

"If that is so, perhaps you are also in trouble, because if a resident monk is arrested, the Abbot must be interrogated," the new monk retorted.

"Then you should bail him out, as he is your teacher," the Phra Khru told the headmaster.

"Yes, sir, I will bail you out," Mr. Srist promised Phra Buahyao.

"What are you saying? Luang Poh is only teasing, but you take him seriously," Phongphak said, interrupting her husband.

"But father is only teasing, too," Wonwilai said. Phra Buahyao had to think hard, for he found it difficult to decide whose voice was more beautiful, the elder sister's or the younger.

"In my friend's case, was this caused by karma, sir?" asked Phongphan.

"Certainly. In particular, the driver's karma is called 'immediately effective karma.' Drinking alcohol is the worst violation of the Five Precepts, as it causes heedlessness. If one is inattentive, one can easily violate all the Five Precepts. This case is evidence that evil will result in evil. Your friend

must have had a karmic connection with that woman from a previous life, for if there were no cause, there could not be any effect. Don't you wonder why that should have happened to her rather than another person? Every day, many thousands of people make telephone calls on the street. Why aren't they killed as your friend was? It is because they did not have the karmic connection, isn't that right?" he asked Wonwilai.

"Yes, sir. Perhaps my father and mother also had a karmic connection with each other," the young lady said, intending to tease her parents.

"That is right, and not only your parents, but also you and your future husband. I have seen what will happen to you. Although you have good luck in your education, in marriage you will have bad luck. You will need a lot of patience to avoid a separation. Your future husband is full of pride, impatience, and unkind speech. However, his unkind speech is only for you. With other ladies he will speak kindly, so you will become jealous and suffer greatly."

"Knowing this, I won't marry him," said Wonwilai.

"It would be better if you did not. But when the time comes, you will not say what you say now. You will tell me, 'Luang Poh, I pity him. I married him out of sympathy, not love,'" the Abbot said, imitating her voice, which made everyone laugh.

"Is he a playboy, sir?" she asked.

"He is not really a playboy, but a man with kindly speech always attracts women."

"Well, now I am upset, because I believe what you say. I am sure that you have attained the divine eye and telepathy," she said, speaking from knowledge gained in her studies.

"You wait and see if what I have said is right or wrong. In eight years you will realize that everything has come true. If not, then you can come and tell me so."

Phra Buahyao was thinking, "Maybe that man is me."

Then Wonwilai asked, "Have I met him, sir?" The new monk listened attentively, but was disappointed when the Abbot replied, "You have walked past him many times at the university, but you have never spoken to each other. As it happens, he has not been interested in you because he has a girlfriend. He has to exhaust his karma with that woman first. He will marry her two years from now, and they will separate the same year. She will leave him with their child, so your sweetheart will be a divorcee with one son."

"It's good for me that I won't have to bear a child, because his son will

be my son. Isn't that right, sister?" she asked Phongphan.

"But when that time comes, the situation won't be what you will have thought and hoped it would be. Remember my words: your husband will make you dry your tears with a pair of knees."

"Whose knees, sir, his or mine?" The young woman laughed gaily, as she was not serious about anything. Having been brought up with love and care, Wonwilai had no way of knowing what suffering is. She had never thought that she herself would ever experience it. In eight years' time, things would be different, however. Her charm and her joyful and optimistic character would vanish without a trace. She would be a different person. Eight years from now she would come and sit weeping in front of the Abbot. She did not know this, but he did.

"It depends on circumstances: partly yours, and partly his. Yes, you can laugh now, but in the future you will not be able to. Let us wait and see."

"Will it be so serious, sir?" Phongphak asked, beginning to be worried for her younger daughter.

"It's her karma, Upasika," replied the Phra Khru, using the formal term for a female adherent. "She has created this karma in her previous life."

"Educated people would not behave like that," she retorted.

"It does not depend on education, Upasika, it depends on karma. Lots of educated couples come to see me. Some have master's degrees, some doctorates, but they fight and beat each other, and sometimes a husband kicks his wife off their house."

At this, the headmaster's wife sat speechless, worrying for her daughter. The Abbot consoled her by saying, "Don't worry, Upasika. All sentient beings are dependent on their karma. I, too, have to expiate my karma, much more serious than your daughter's. Once it is expiated, there will be no more karma to be endured."

"I am worried about her, sir."

"Do not worry. Whoever creates karma will experience its fruit. In any case, it will not last long. After nine years of marriage, she will be happy. Her husband is really a good man, but their previous karma will cause them to quarrel. You see, you have harmed him in a previous life." The last sentence the Abbot directed to Wonwilai. He was able to see all of her karma, although she could not.

Listening to this, Phra Buahyao now began aiming his hopes at Wonwilai's sister. Just at that moment, Phongphan asked the Abbot with

wide eyes, "Luang Poh, have I met my true lifetime partner?"

The new monk listened alertly, hoping his preceptor would say, 'Yes, but at the moment he is a monk,' but his heart nearly stopped beating when the Abbot said, "How many sweethearts do you want? You only got married last August, and the car you drove here was bought for you by your husband, wasn't it?"

Phra Buahyao's face went pale. The Phra Khru was both satisfied and sorry for his pupil, so he consoled him by saying, "Some people have no true lifetime partner, for they have no co-operative karma with anyone. For instance, Phra Buahyao will be a monk his whole life, and will be happier than if he were in lay life."

"I agree with you completely, sir," declared the headmaster fervently, saluting him with joined palms. "You are very lucky that you don't have to be responsible for a family. I am now chastened. For many years, until my children could support themselves, I was in difficulty. I had to work hard to support them. If I were to become single again, I would join the monkhood for the rest of my life."

The headmaster's words were a great encouragement to Phra Buahyao. Moreover, the Abbot added, "If marriage could give real happiness, then Prince Siddhattha would not have abdicated his throne and become an ascetic. Do you want to know why marriage cannot make you happy?" He stood up and walked to the cabinet containing the Tipitaka, picked out one of the books of the Pali Canon and returned to his seat. "Here in this book, the Buddha has given a discourse concerning the disadvantages of sensual pleasures." He handed the book to Mr. Srist, and told him to open it to page 360.

"Please read the Khaggavisana Suttanidesa from item 764 to 766 for us."

The headmaster read loudly, *"Item 764: sensual pleasures are bondage, providing little pleasure but much suffering. Realizing that sensual pleasures are like an infectious disease, the wise give up the world and wander alone like the rhinoceros.... Item 765: O monks, that happiness which is caused by the five sense-objects, that happiness I call sensual pleasure. Sensual pleasures are of small quantity, they are inferior, contaminated and cause suffering. Therefore, sensual pleasures are bondage, providing little pleasure.... Item 766: Sensual pleasures are slightly pleasant, but very painful. The Buddha says that sensual pleasures are like a skeleton, like a piece of meat, like a firebrand, like a pit of fire, like a dream, like something borrowed, like a fruit, like a sword, like a wolf, like a spear, like a lance, like the head of a cobra ... Being slightly pleasant but very painful, there is much lam-*

entation, much disadvantage.... "

When Mr. Srist had finished reading, the Abbot inquired of him, "Now then, have you understood this deeply? Have you seen that being a monk is much better than being a layman?"

"Oh, I feel jealous of you, Luang Poh. If I were a man, I would join the monkhood," said Wonwilai. She was a sensitive woman, so she could appreciate such things more easily than most people.

"Although you are a woman, you can join the Order if you want to. I mean that you can join in your mind. Some people join only with their bodies, like those who wear saffron robes and shave their heads but do not conform to the monk's duties. I call such a person 'physically a monk, mentally a devil.'"

"How can I join the Order with my mind?" the young lady asked with interest.

"By practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness as your father does."

"If that is so, then next vacation I will come and stay here for a week," she told her father.

"That's a good idea. Perhaps you can reduce your karma," the headmaster said.

"Luang Poh, and what about my family, sir?" asked Phongphan. Her sister's story had upset her.

"At present your situation is good, since you have just married, but in the future it will become quite bad. Your husband will hang you up to dry, and you will flutter in the wind. Your future looks more difficult than your sister's, because your husband is a womanizer. When he gets bored with you, he will go looking for another girl," the Phra Khru said, having seen her karma.

"It's terrible that both of my daughters will have such bad luck," said Phongphak, feeling sad for her daughters.

"Don't worry too much, Upasika. Everyone is the owner of their own karma. Our duty is to remember that we must expiate the previous karma, and not produce new karma. This is typical of lay life, happiness mixed with suffering."

"Luang Poh, is there any way, any method that will reduce my karma?" asked Phongphan, now anxious about her future.

"Why worry in advance? What will be, will be. You must be brave and face reality. Anyway, there is only one way to lighten your karma. That is to practice vipassana meditation here for at least one week."

"My husband won't let me do that, sir. He doesn't want me to be away from him for too long. Even this morning, when I told him that I would accompany my parents here, he was reluctant to let me go."

"Yes, that is because he still loves you, so he does not want to be apart from you even for one minute. Well then, you can come here when he gets bored with you. At that time I will give you as much help as I can."

"Thank you very much, sir," she said with tears in her eyes, and prostrated to him three times.

After talking for a few minutes longer, the five people said good-bye to the Phra Khru, who reminded the two sisters, "Keep it in mind that you may come here and practice, and do not worry about your future. I have to tell you about it, so that when that time comes you will be mindful and face it bravely, instead of being frightened. Always remember that you must expiate your previous karma and not produce new karma."

The Phra Khru knew that he had to inform them, because when some people were confronted with such situations, they committed suicide to try to escape the suffering, but they cannot escape from it that way; they only create even worse karma for themselves.

"Remember this," he emphasized.

"Yes, sir," the two sisters answered. They prostrated to the Phra Khru and to Phra Buahyao, then walked to the car park, where the other three were waiting.

Chapter 11

The new monk stared after the blue car as it rolled slowly out of the car park on to the Asia Highway, driven by Phongphan.

"You can't take your eyes off them, can you?" his preceptor remarked sardonically.

"That's because I feel sorry for them, sir," said the pupil.

"So you are looking at them with mournful eyes? I know, I know, it is because of your compassion."

"Yes, sir. I never thought it possible that such attractive and educated ladies could have such bad karma," said Phra Buahyao sincerely.

"So you choose to pity only attractive ladies?" the Abbot said, needing his disciple.

"Not necessarily. Don't you pity them?"

"Why shouldn't I? You see how hard I have to work, day and night. Is this not out of compassion? Buahyao, remember this: all sentient beings who are born into the world are pitiful. If they are in trouble and we can help them, we must do so, regardless of who they are or where they come from, whether they are beautiful or ugly. Do you understand?"

"That means that we have to be good friends to everyone, is that right, sir?"

"Yes. If you can do that, then you are worthy to be called a son of the Enlightened One. You know, the Tathagata, our Father, called himself the Good Friend of all sentient beings since he had compassion for all, without discrimination."

"Luang Poh, my sympathy for those ladies in their sufferings doesn't mean that I discriminate. I just thought that for people as fortunate as they are, it would be impossible to have evil karma," explained the new monk.

"That means that you have not understood the true meaning of karma."

Listen carefully, I will explain it for you. The word 'karma' means action, and no deed can be called 'action' unless it is associated with intention, or volition. A wholesome volition causes a wholesome action, and an unwholesome volition causes an unwholesome action. For that reason, an action or karma can be either good or evil, depending on the volition that causes it. However, most people imagine that karma refers only to evil or unwholesome actions. The Buddha's teaching that 'all sentient beings are dependent on their karma' means that one who does good will gather goodness, and one who does harm will gather harm, for karma arises out of the agent of action, just as rust arises from iron. If there is no agent, there is no karma. In the case of those two ladies, if they had done nothing, then they would not have to face any consequences," the Abbot explained precisely.

"You speak as if we can choose to create karma."

"Certainly we can. It is true that we cannot choose our previous karma, because it is past, and our duty is to expiate it, but we can choose our present karma. Some people do not understand this, so they simply accept the way they are, rather than trying to better themselves. An example would be a drunkard who goes on drinking because he thinks his karma has made him that way. This is only an excuse, because if he wants to give up, he can. Another example is a person who is born poor because in a previous life he was mean and never gave anything to anyone else. If he thinks that he is poor because of his karma, and therefore lazily gives up the struggle for a better way of life, then he will be born poor forever."

"That means that he should try to resist his fate," said Phra Buahyao. "I mean, he must work hard in his career to accumulate good new karma. As for his previous bad karma, he has expiated it by being born poor, is this right, sir?"

"Yes, that's right. And if he becomes rich but he is still mean, if he never gives anything to the poor, then he will be born poor again in a future life."

The two monks were quiet for a while, then the younger one asked, "Luang Poh, about those two young ladies, is there any way for them to expiate their karma?"

"Yes, but on the condition that they show great patience in practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness—this is the only way for them to resolve their evil karma. But now they are not interested because they do not realize what suffering is. During the next eight years, the younger sister will get married and will experience the nature of suffering. Then she will consider my words and seek my help. So she, and her sister as well, will

come here."

"But she said that she would come during her holidays, sir," protested Phra Buahyao.

"She intends to come, but, believe me, she won't be able to, because it is not yet time for her to do so. She will come eight years from now."

"Luang Poh, what did the younger sister do to produce an effect like this?" The young monk still had doubts. Right now he could see how interesting the younger sister was, because she was single, attractive, and cheerful. But soon she would be none of these.

"It is difficult to explain. This depends on both previous karma and the karma of this life. What is due to previous karma cannot be avoided. In this case, Miss Wonwilai and that man created evil karma together in their previous lives, and now they are compelled to join their lives together by marrying. As for recent karma, she will be a very jealous wife, and her jealousy will make her very unhappy."

"Apart from what you have mentioned, does she have other karma, sir?" the pupil wondered.

"We accumulate karma all the time, according to our deeds. I have not mentioned indeterminate karma, which is very subtle and hard to understand. If the karma we create is strong enough, it will bear fruit in this existence. As for Miss Wonwilai, the more jealous she is, the more unhappy she will be. This karma she can avoid, but she won't. It is not her fault alone, since that man will give her reason to be jealous. It will please him very much to see his wife so jealous. It could be said that the happiness of the husband depends on the misery of his wife."

"Does that mean that if she is not jealous, then she won't suffer?"

"Yes."

"If I were her, I would not be jealous. I would not make myself unhappy."

"Because you are not her you can say that. But if you were her, it is certain that you would do as she does. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you do not, it is all right. I don't mind."

"But I think that it's better to believe you, sir. I am your pupil, and if I don't believe my teacher, then who can I believe? I don't want to be called an ungrateful person."

"It is good that you think that way."

"Thank you, sir."

"What are you thanking me for?" the Abbot asked.

"Because you have praised me for being good, sir."

"When did I praise you?" the Phra Khru asked, puzzled.

"Just now. You said, 'It is good that you think that way.' Doesn't that mean that you are praising me?" Now the teacher realized that he was being manipulated by his pupil, and that if he said anything, it would only make the situation worse. It was better to keep quiet.

"Luang Poh, sir..." the new monk had just realized that what he was doing was not being mindful regarding the body, feelings, and ideas or thoughts, as his preceptor had taught him. "Are we being heedless now, by talking about other people, which is not in keeping with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness?"

"Why should that be? Our conversation now may be described as 'mindfulness regarding thoughts,' as long as we are mindful at all times of what we are talking about. Here, this means 'one knows a mind without delusion as a mind without delusion.' Are you mindful all the time?"

"No, sir, only sometimes," the new monk admitted.

"This means that your mind hasn't become fully concentrated, so it is necessary to try much harder. What we are talking about is not useless, because I am going to tell you that Miss Wonwilai will become my foremost assistant in spreading the Teachings of the Buddha. She and I have helped each other in a previous life, and in our present existence we will help each other again."

The new monk's eyes opened wide, and he stuttered, "You mean that you ... and she ... used to be ..."

"No, no. Not like that," said the Abbot, immediately cutting him off.

"Now then, if you want to know I shall tell you. But you should promise that you will not tell anyone else, because it would be harmful for them if they do not believe it. I have never told this story to anyone else. Do you promise this?"

"Yes, sir, I do promise."

Thereupon, the Abbot closed his eyes, as if he wanted to recollect the events of his previous birth. Then he spoke: "I was commander-in-chief of Ayudhya, and Miss Wonwilai was my adjutant officer, named Cansom."

"And what was your name, sir?"

"I'd better not tell you, because that name is written in Thai history. I went to check it at the National Library. My name was inscribed there as a commander-in-chief before Ayudhya was defeated by Burma."

"Please continue your story, sir."

"I and Mr. Cansom went into battle together many times. The last

time was in the year 1767, before Ayudhya was lost. My troops were defeated because our morale was poor and we had lost our will to fight. I told Cansom to flee. He refused at first, but I advised him that if he did not, he would surely die. If he escaped, on the other hand, he might be able to join with other soldiers and save the country one day. So he ran away to Nakhonswan, suffering great hardship during his escape. He died there. Before he drew his last breath, he reflected to himself that being born as a man was terrible suffering, so he wanted to be born as a woman in his next life. His determination made his wish come true. Before dying, he also thought of me. So we had to meet again, in this life."

"And you, you fled here?"

"As commander-in-chief, it was impossible for me to escape. So I fought until the moment I was killed. But I passed away with mindfulness. I forgave the fellow who killed me, and I hoped that the people whom I had killed would forgive me, since we did not hate each other. We were fighting for our country. Because I thought in this way, I was not very sinful. I spent one hundred and sixty-eight years in expiating my karma. After that, I was born as a human being again. Please do not ask me where and how I expiated my evil karma. It is too complicated to explain, and it would be pointless for you to know."

"Does Miss Wonwilai know that she was with you in another life?"

"No, and do not tell her that, will you?"

"No, sir, I won't. And her sweetheart, what was he in his previous life?"

"Mr. Cansom's wife. He beat her nearly every day. She promised herself to get revenge, and she resolved to be reborn as a man, which is what happened. It sounds like a novel, don't you think?"

"Yes, sir. I think that fiction is always based on real life."

"You have seen that we have to be born and die countless times in the unending cycle of birth and death. This is why I am tired of being reborn. I do not want to be reborn any more, not even once."

"The reason the Tathagata became an ascetic was that he was weary of rebirth, wasn't it, sir?"

"That is right. When he was enlightened, in addition to attaining the threefold knowledge, he ... but please tell me what the threefold knowledge is."

"Is that the same as *tevijja*, sir?"

"Yes. Tell me what it is. I remember that I taught you this yesterday."

"Yes, sir, you taught me that the threefold knowledge consists of

pubbenivasanussati-ñāna, cutupapata-ñāna and asavakkhaya-ñāna, sir," the new monk said, recalling the Pali words.

"Very good. Now tell me the meaning of each word."

"I can't, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because you haven't taught me the meaning, sir."

"But why didn't you ask me? I thought you knew."

"Sometimes, although I don't know, I don't want to ask, sir."

"Then by the same token, I will not tell you. You can learn for yourself."

"Please tell me, Venerable Luang Poh, I bow to you." He bowed to the Abbot with joined palms.

"No! And if I say no, then it is no. I realize that if I told you now, you would retort, 'You said that you wouldn't tell me, so why did you tell me after all?', isn't that right?" The pupil smiled, abashed, as he had intended to say just that.

"Now then, let us turn to the previous topic. After attaining the three-fold knowledge, the Buddha realized that being in the cycle of birth and death caused misery. When he taught his disciples, he always gave analogies such as, *'Wherever you strike with a needle on this earth, that place has been a grave of mine. If my bones from each birth were massed together, the heap would be higher than Mount Meru and the tears caused by my suffering from having to depart each life would be much greater than the water in all the oceans of the world. That is why the Tathagata is weary of birth, and will not be reborn.'* He stated this many times, to make clear to all sentient beings the disadvantages of being in the cycle of birth and death. Even so, there are many who do not believe him, so they will have to continue forever dying and being reborn."

"And you, will you be born again, sir?" the new monk asked eagerly.

"It depends on causes and conditions," answered the Abbot.

"What causes and conditions, sir?"

"There are three kinds: karma, which is like a field; consciousness, which is like a seed; and craving, which is like the water that makes the seed sprout and grow in the field. If these three conditions work together, there will be birth."

"And you? Have you eradicated these conditions, sir?" asked the pupil.

"This issue is very serious. It should not be spoken of lightly, so I will not tell you. If you want to know, it is essential for you to practice hard. This kind of knowledge must be acquired by one's own direct experience."

"Then please tell me one thing. This time I am sure that you can answer."

"No need to ask. Since you want to know, I will answer." He felt shy, because he knew what the new monk wanted to ask him. He had never told anyone before, and Phra Buahyao would be the first and the last to know.

"My wife in my previous life will come here to make merit. She will build a big belfry for this monastery. Now she is married to a doctor. You know, she is beautiful, as beautiful as an angel, and more charming than in her previous birth."

"Is she as attractive as Apassara, sir?" asked Phra Buahyao, referring to a previous Miss Thailand who had become Miss Universe five or six years before.

"Much more attractive, and she is also very kind-hearted."

"Don't you miss her, sir?" the pupil said, trying to provoke his teacher.

"Why should I miss her? This is a different birth. If I missed her, then I would not have become a monk. Now then, do not ask any more. We have already talked quite a lot. Now you go back to your lodging and practice. If there is anything to ask about, then you may come and ask. Remember that a good meditator should eat little, sleep little, speak little, and practice a lot. If you can do this, then you will not be born again."

Phra Buahyao prostrated to his preceptor three times and left. His feelings at that moment were inexplicable. He felt depressed and lonely; he had never felt this way before. He tried to concentrate on his movement as he walked, but he could not get rid of these feelings. It was not quite true that he felt pity for those two ladies, for he had realized that their fate depended on their karma. He had to investigate what had caused these feelings to arise.

On arriving at his lodging, the new monk bathed and felt fresher. Yet the feelings still disturbed him. He began to practice the first stage of walking meditation and finished the sixth stage two hours later. Then he practiced sitting meditation, and when his mind was concentrated, he looked for the cause of his unusual feelings. He found it was the Abbot's words that he would have no lifetime partner. It was true that normal people needed love and wanted to have a happy family. They also needed children to succeed them. Once he had realized that he would not be able to have what normal people had, feelings of sadness had arisen in him and remained in his subconscious. Although he was a man in the special circumstances of having been ordained, these feelings still greatly disturbed him. And what about

women, those frail creatures? If they knew that they would have no life-time partner, and would live with loneliness their whole life long, how much more suffering would they feel?



Chapter 12

Having finished his breakfast, the Phra Khru went upstairs to write more of his book. He told Somchai that he would be spending the next two hours on it, and that if anyone came to see him during this time, they would have to wait. A moment after the Abbot left the room, a young man came and asked for permission to see him. He arrived with a very beautiful woman, who appeared to be his sweetheart. On being told by the lay attendant of the Abbot's instructions, he said he did not want to wait, and went up the stairs. Unfortunately, the door was locked, so he shouted through it, "Uncle, I want to see you. Open the door, please."

There was no reply. The lay attendant knew well that if the Abbot intended to work, he would acknowledge nothing. No matter who came or called him, he would not come out.

Thinking that his uncle had not heard, the young man shouted louder, "Uncle, it's me, Joi, your nephew. I want to see you." Again there was no response. Joi felt that he was losing face in front of both the lay attendant and his sweetheart, whom he wished to introduce to his uncle.

"He won't come down. Even if I called him, he wouldn't come. When he is writing, he won't allow anyone to meet him," Somchai said politely, trying to be friendly, although he felt dislike for this fellow. He might be the Abbot's nephew, but there was no need for him to show off that way.

"Then let's go and see the river behind the monastery. It's the Chao Phraya River, do you remember?" Joi said to his sweetheart, as he did not want to have to associate with the lay attendant. They had nearly two hours to while away before his uncle would come down.

When the Phra Khru eventually did come downstairs, he found the man and the woman waiting for him. While he was working, his mind had been so concentrated that he was not conscious of external things, so he did

not know that his nephew had come.

"It's you, Joi! How are you?" he said, greeting his elder sister's son, who had been ordained as a novice in this monastery about ten years before but had left the Order before becoming a monk. The Abbot did not know the woman who accompanied his nephew, although he thought her face looked familiar.

"How are you, uncle?" asked Joi.

"So-so. And you? You have been away for a long time," the Phra Khru said, chiding his nephew. Joi hadn't visited him once since leaving the Order.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I have been very busy working for my father, who has a cotton plantation in Tha Tako District, where we moved. Since it's very far from here, it's difficult to make the trip, sir."

"So you've moved from Khok Samrong, have you? And how is your father?" he asked after his brother-in-law, his sister, Joi's mother, having died while her son was a novice.

"He is quite well, sir. Now he has a new wife, and has three children," said Joi.

"Really? He is nearly sixty. Why does he have to look after small children?"

"He doesn't, sir. It's his wife who takes the responsibility."

"Why don't you call her 'mother'?"

"Because she is my friend. She used to be my classmate when we were young, so I can't call her 'mother.' It is her bad luck to be my father's wife, as he drinks every day. In fact, he does nothing but drink. I suggested to him that he should take ordination here, but he refused."

"Why shouldn't he refuse, when his son has already done the same?" the Abbot retorted.

"Uncle, that happened so long ago. Please don't mention it," Joi requested.

"All right, I won't. Since you have come today, does this mean you want help from me?"

"Yes, sir. May I introduce my fiancée to you? We came to invite you to our wedding."

"I see, this is your fiancée. Where are you from?" he asked his nephew's sweetheart.

"Uncle, don't you remember her? She is Miss Juk," Joi replied for his fiancée.

"Who is Miss Juk?" The Phra Khru could not recall her.

"The girl who use to offer food to us every morning when we went out for alms by boat," Joi said.

However, the Abbot still had no recollection of her, so he used 'perceiving' to aid him, and then exclaimed with pleasure, "I see, I see. You are that girl. Oh! You have grown into a very beautiful woman, so beautiful that I did not recognize you." It had never occurred to the Abbot that he would meet that girl again. Juk was embarrassed by his admiration; she sat speechless, gazing at the floor.

In his mind, the Phra Khru summoned up the events of ten years before. At that time he had not yet studied vipassana meditation, and he was fond of magic. He had a mirror which he used to see the future. But after he met the Monk in the Forest and learned how to practice vipassana meditation through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, he gave up magic, realizing that it would not provide real benefit in life. In those days, he went out for alms by boat. Every morning, he and *Samanera* (Novice) Joi would row along the Chao Phraya River.

Living there by the river was a thin girl of about eleven years of age. People called her Juk, which means 'topknot', as she wore her hair tied in a tuft at the crown of her head. Her nose was always dripping, and her eyes were rheumy. It happened frequently that the drops from her nose fell right into their bowls, but she ignored it. After rowing past her house, *Samanera* Joi would throw the food in the bowl into the river with disgust. Although the Phra Khru was practicing the meditation on 'perception of the loathsomeness of food,' he did the same as his nephew.

"Uncle, when will this girl die? I wish she would perish as soon as possible," *Samanera* Joi would curse every time he wasted the food by throwing it in the river.

"Cursing her will cause yourself harm," the monk said.

"I am so angry, and she has made me this way," the nephew fumed.

"Being angry is being foolish. A foolish person is a mad one. If you want to be a madman as well as an idiot, then keep your wrath."

"Uncle, can we give up going to her house, sir?" the nephew suggested.

"We cannot, because that is against the Discipline. We have no right to discriminate."

"Then we should tell her directly not to offer food to us, and ask her father or her mother to take her duty."

"You can tell her yourself."

"No, sir, because I am a boy. It's better if you do it."

"No. I do not want to be told off," the Phra Khru said. So they both had to go on being offered food by the girl until the road to the monastery was built, and they stopped going out by boat for alms. Samanera Joi was very happy that he would no longer have to throw the food into the river.

One night, Samanera Joi asked his uncle to show him his lifetime partner, by using his "magic" mirror. The Phra Khru told him that first he had to vow that he would accept the person he saw in the mirror. Then he handed him the mirror. The novice exploded when he saw in the mirror an image of the dirty girl with the runny nose and rheumy eyes.

"That awful girl! You're having me on!" the novice shouted loudly. "I don't want this girl. I give her to you," he said as he handed the mirror back to the Phra Khru.

Now, ten years on, the prediction had come true. The Abbot, returning his thoughts to the present, said impishly to his nephew, "Now then, why are you marrying this girl, when you always said she made you sick?"

"I didn't know that she was the same girl, because I had not seen her since I left the Order. By the time I realized she was that dirty girl, I already loved her with all my heart. If I had known at first, then I would not have fallen in love with her," Joi said.

"What a terrible thing to say, Joi! I could easily break off my engagement to you right now. I wouldn't have to worry. There are hundreds of men who want to marry me," the young lady said angrily.

"Why are you getting angry, Juk? You are going to be my relative soon. Can't I tease you?" the Abbot said.

"I am not upset with you. I am upset with Joi," she persisted. The young lady did not realize how her charming looks were marred by anger.

"Well, don't argue with me. Tell me when you are getting married. If I have an appointment on that day, I can cancel it."

"We think on 9 December. Will you please check to see if it is an auspicious date? If not, please give us a new one."

"Auspicious dates are not as important as our own minds. If we are good, then what we do will be good. Being a Buddhist, there is no need to believe in auspicious dates. Remember this, if you trust me."

"Apart from you, who can I trust?" the nephew said. "My mother has passed away, and my father cannot be my refuge, as he is drunk day and night. Only you can be my true refuge."

"It's good that you think like that. To tell the truth, I wish you were a monk, because as a monk you could lessen your rebirths, otherwise you will have to circle endlessly in the round of birth and death," the Phra Khru

said sincerely.

"I would like to, sir, but I have to think of Juk. If I became a monk, who would take care of her, since her parents are dead?"

"No problem. She can be a nun. Both of you can practice vipassana meditation here at this monastery," the Abbot said.

"It would be good if we could do that, but I am afraid of being expelled if I cannot control my mind. Anyway, the robes seem to dislike me," the nephew said, refusing politely because he did not want to offend his uncle.

"If you fear that, then it is better for you to remain a layman, because some actions are forbidden for monks, such as sexual relations, singing and dancing. Anyway, even if you do not want to be a monk, I still hope that the two of you will come and practice vipassana meditation for a week; after that, then you can practice at any time."

"I am very busy. I don't have time to practice, so it would be a waste of time to come. But I will come when I am old," Joi replied, temporizing.

"I see. You intend to postpone coming here until your old age. But what if you die while you are still young?" the Phra Khru asked.

"As fate will have it."

"If you leave yourself to fate, then it means that you are very heedless in life. Nowadays, so many people live their whole lives heedlessly. Can you be certain that you will come here in your old age? I think that you will be drunk day and night like your father."

"Uncle, please, I have been away for a long time, so now that I have come, why are you trying to preach to me? I think it would be better if we talked about something important," Joi said irritably.

"Well, if you were not my nephew, I would have nothing to do with you. You too, Miss Juk: if you want to live a happy life, what I am telling you now is not rubbish but the highest benefit, so you should find a chance to come and practice. It is not necessary for you to come together. You could take turns coming. And do not make the excuse that you have no time, as this only indicates your misunderstanding of the practice. Practicing does not mean that you have to walk reciting 'left step,' and 'right step,' or sit reciting, 'rising,' and 'falling,' all the time. If that were the case, it would be impossible to do anything else."

"Yes, sir, that's why I do not value the practice. It wastes the time one could use in earning a living," exclaimed Joi.

"That is a great misconception, my dear nephew. Please get it straight that the reason you need to stay in the monastery for seven days is to learn

the principle and the method, so you are then able to apply them in your daily life. You can practice while you are working. That means that all the time you are working, you will also be practicing. Now tell me, while you are working, are you breathing or not?" he asked the two of them.

"Yes, sir, I breathe all the time," Juk replied.

"Then, while you are breathing, you can mentally recite, 'rising,' as you breathe in, and 'falling,' as you breathe out. And whatever you are doing, such as plowing, sowing, or weeding, you can simply do it mindfully; in this way you can be called a practitioner. It isn't difficult, is it? For lay people, it is not necessary to think about Path, Fruit, and Nibbana. Just to strive to have a peaceful mind in this life is enough, and when death comes, to die without bewilderment. Whoever does not train their mind will die in bewilderment."

Joi did not understand. "And what is the difference between these two types of death, sir?"

"The difference is the destination. Those who die with a bewildered mind will be born in an evil state, while those who die with an unbewildered mind will be born in good states."

"I still don't understand, sir. Will you please clarify this?" his nephew persisted.

"Well then, listen carefully. Evil states are unhappy states of existence or unhappy realms, of which there are four: hell, the ghost realm, the host of demons, and the animal realm. Whoever commits evil will be born in one of these unhappy states. As for good birth, this means the blissful states of existence, of which there are twenty-seven. They include states from the human realm up to the state of neither perception nor non-perception. Those who do good will be reborn in one of these twenty-seven realms. Thus, there are thirty-one realms of existence, and rebirth in any of them depends on one's karma."

"According to your explanation, sir, if we create no karma, then we won't be reborn, is that right?"

"Yes. This state of not being born is what we call Nibbana."

"That means that whoever creates no karma will go to Nibbana, is that right, sir?"

"It is impossible to create no karma, and in any case, we do not say 'go to Nibbana,' because Nibbana is not a place to which people can come or go. Nibbana is the extinction of all defilement and suffering. If we follow the Noble Eightfold Path by practicing insight meditation until wisdom illuminates us, then that wisdom will eradicate all defilements, and Nibbana

is attained. Now then, let us not talk too much about this, as it is very hard for worldly people even to imagine."

"Venerable Uncle, the person who dies in bewilderment, what is he like? I mean, how can we know whether someone will die in bewilderment or not?" asked Juk.

"We can know, because there are cases of this sort, such as Mr. Im, who lived next door to this monastery, but never came to practice. Although I suggested to him that he should come, he always put it off. As he was dying, he told his son to invite me. I went, and I found him nearly on his last breath, although he was still able to speak. I told him to recite, 'Buddho, Buddho,' but he could not hear me. Then one of his sons said to him in a loud voice, 'Daddy, join your palms and say, 'Buddho, Buddho.' Then he became angry and cursed his son, saying, 'Evil son, I am going now. Don't push me.' 'I didn't push you,' his son argued. 'What do you mean?' he whispered back through clenched teeth. 'You said, "Just go, just go." Isn't that pushing me?' Though his son tried to explain, he did not understand, as he had never trained his mind to be familiar with such things. Finally, he passed away in mindlessness."

"And he died in anger at his son, sir?"

"Yes. When he got angry, his mind became unwholesome. The Buddha says that when one's mind becomes unwholesome, then unhappy states will be one's destination. Anyway, Mr. Im was born in an unhappy state.

"Another example is the case of Mrs. On. She earned her living by catching shellfish and snails: freshwater snails, apple snails, and swamp snails. She would catch many buckets of them every day and take them to the market to sell. As she was about to die, a karmic sign appeared. She saw thousands of shellfish before her very eyes. Her daughter told her to say, 'Araham,' meaning Enlightened One, but she said, 'Oyster,' instead," the Abbot told them.

"Does anyone die with mindfulness?" Juk asked.

"They do. There was an old woman named Candra. Her grandchildren took her to practice vipassana meditation at the age of seventy-five."

"That's not too old to practice, sir?" asked Joi.

"Nearly, but not absolutely."

"And why did her grandchildren have to take her at the age of seventy-five, sir?"

"They told me that she had become very forgetful. She had been absent-minded since she was just over sixty years old."

Juk asked, "Are absent-minded people able to practice, sir?"

“Yes, because absent-mindedness is different from insanity. If someone should become mentally ill, then they will not be able to practice. Now then, her children told me that their grandmother had been very absent-minded. One day she wanted some firewood to start a fire. As she approached the stack of firewood, she didn’t notice that a dog was sleeping there. Instead of picking up a piece of wood, she picked up the leg of the dog, which bit her in fright. She became very angry, and cursed herself, saying, ‘Alas, how confused I am. I wanted to pick up some pieces of dog, but picked up the leg of firewood instead.’”

Joi and his fiancée laughed when they heard the old woman’s words. The Phra Khru also smiled, then continued his story.

“She did not want to stay in the monastery, so after her initiation ceremony as a disciple of the teacher, I instructed her in the practice and told her to practice at home. Three days later, she came back and said to me, ‘Luang Poh, I cannot practice because I am too busy looking after my grandchildren.’ I suggested that she could do whatever she did with mindfulness. For example, if she wanted to gather firewood, while she was walking she could recite, ‘Picking up pieces of firewood,’ then she would not pick up a dog’s leg by mistake. I instructed her until she understood. Then she returned home. She practiced at home for months, and became a mindful person.”

“Is she still alive, sir?” asked Joi.

“No, she died at the age of eighty. Her grandchildren reported that after having practiced vipassana meditation, their grandmother became very alert, doing everything with care. Some old people are careless in their eating and toilet habits, and make their relatives tired of them. Those who have practiced the Four Foundations of Mindfulness will not be a bother to their family. This is an advantage of practicing.”

“If that is so, may I stay here and practice? Will you allow me to do that?” Juk asked her future husband.

“Yes, if you want. But you don’t have any white clothes.”

The Abbot said, “Never mind, we have enough in the monastery. Some people have donated quite a lot. If you decide to stay here, you do not have to worry about anything. And you,” he said to his nephew, “do you want to stay?”

Knowing that his fiancée wanted to stay and practice, Joi replied, “Yes, sir. It’s better than just coming and leaving again.”

The Phra Khru encouraged them both, saying, “It is good for both of you. You are taking the right way in life, the only way that leads to the end

of suffering. If you continue practicing throughout your entire lives, you will certainly reach the ultimate goal, if not in this life, then perhaps in the next life, and if not in the next life, then in some future rebirth.”

“About my wedding—please don’t forget it.” Joi was still worried about worldly concerns.

“Certainly not. I will arrange everything. Now then, I will tell Somchai to take Miss Juk to the nuns’ quarters. And you can stay with Phra Buahyao. Somchai will arrange it for you after he returns from the nunnery. Please wait for him here.” Then the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan went upstairs to continue his writing.



Chapter 13

Have you been a monk for long, sir?" Joi asked Phra Buahyao after the lay attendant had shown him to the new monk's lodgings. "I joined the Order only last month," replied the young monk. Knowing that the man was the Phra Khru's nephew, he decided to take good care of him. At least he could express his gratitude to the Abbot by doing so.

"Really? I thought that you must have been ordained at least ten years." Joi guessed that Phra Buahyao was about forty.

"Do I look as old as that?" asked the new monk.

"No, sir. You look only around thirty-six or thirty-seven."

This upset Phra Buahyao. "You see? You really do think that I am old. I am only twenty-six but you say I look ten years older than my real age."

"Really? Then you are only a year older than I am. But are you sure that you haven't missed some years in your mind? Perhaps your mother declared your birth when you were already ten." The man was still not convinced.

"That's no way to talk to anyone. Don't you have anything better to say? Nobody treats me like this," Phra Buahyao said angrily.

Realizing that he was making things worse, Joi said quickly, "Please don't be upset. I am only joking with you. You are more modest and more dignified than the other monks I have known. That's why I thought that you had been a monk for years. You really are different from them."

"Why?" asked the new monk.

"Because they make people mistrust them. They don't watch their manners, their speech, or their thoughts. One of the worst is called Luang Ta Thong. He is drunk day and night."

"And the Abbot of his monastery doesn't do anything about it?"

"No, because the Abbot is worse than Luang Ta Thong. He rarely stays at the monastery. Some people say that he stays at home with his wife and goes to the monastery only eight days a month, on the tonsure days and the holy days."

"But he is a monk. How can he have a wife?" Phra Buahyao objected. He had never heard of such a thing.

"Genuine monks can't but these fellows are false ones. They practice priest craft. You know, Luang Ta Thong was a drunkard before he ordained. He joined the Order to give up drinking, but he couldn't. As for the Abbot, I am not making this up. Some people saw him at his wife's house." Joi did not tell the new monk that the "some people" included himself.

"But why don't people force these monks to disrobe? Their behavior defiles the monkhood as well as our religion," Phra Buahyao said, clearly upset by what he was hearing.

"It's a long story, sir. The Abbot is a very powerful man. He used to be a gangster before he joined the Order. Some people tried to do something about it, but then one of them was killed. They knew that the Abbot was the one who ordered the killing, but nobody dared to accuse him, and the story automatically finished there."

"That's terrible," said Phra Buahyao sadly.

"In the end, people stopped giving alms to the monks of that monastery, in protest," Joi said.

"I don't agree with that. Even if some monks are bad, that does not mean that all monks are. It's not fair to the good monks, and there are many of these. Anyway, if people stop making offerings, they lose the chance to make merit for themselves."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that if we stop doing good, then we miss the chance to be born in heaven or to achieve spiritual perfection. You have to think of all monks as human beings, of whom there are both good and bad. Anyway, if we offer alms to bad monks, it doesn't mean that we will become as bad as they are."

"Then, suppose I give Luang Ta Tong twenty baht and he spends it on drink. As the person who gave him the money, have I committed a wrong?" the man asked.

"You misunderstand me. Doing good by giving with a pure mind, no matter who we give to, and provided that the things we give are honestly and virtuously earned, we are performing what is called meritorious action. Suppose a monk asks you for a donation to his monastery, and you

trust him and give willingly, then you earn merit the moment you donate. If the monk spends the money on intoxicants, only he is being sinful, not you. So whenever you do some good, you earn immediate merit. Moreover, doing good prolongs the life of our religion, because if everyone thought that all monks were bad and so gave up doing good, then the religion would disappear, wouldn't it?" Only a month after his ordination, the new monk already had a profound understanding of religious teachings.

"What you have said may be true. Some join the Order for reasons that have nothing to do with true faith. Some parents want their sons to be ordained because of their bad behavior. Some murderers use the robes to hide their guilt. In this way, the monastery can become a place where bad people stay, just like unwanted dogs and cats are left in the monastery," Joi said with a gesture of resignation.

"But even if they have been bad before, they can become good after being ordained. That is their good fortune," Phra Buahyao said, unable to avoid recalling his own past.

"Yes, sir, but it depends on many factors, such as the circumstances or the fate of that person."

"And the most important thing is the teacher. If he meets a good teacher, he has a chance to become good. Speaking for myself, I can say frankly that I was not a good person before, but when I met my good teacher, Luang Poh, I was able to change. Luang Poh is very strict, and any monks who behaved badly would be asked to go somewhere else."

"Well, you said you ordained only last month. That means that you ordained during the rains-retreat, didn't you? You are very lucky, because other monasteries ask you to wait until the end of the retreat."

"Yes, Luang Poh was very kind to me. He said it doesn't matter when you ordain. The essential thing is that after the ordination you must practice diligently and attentively. Monks who have been in the Order for years but do not practice are at fault. Lay people who practice hard for just a week are better than such monks."

"I think so, too. That's why my uncle wanted me and my fiancée to practice. What you say makes me feel happier. If people tell me I am an unfinished man, I can explain things to them."

"What is an unfinished man?" The new monk did not understand.

"It means a man who has never been a monk. It's true that I was a novice for many years, but I did not become a monk. People often goad me about being unfinished. But sometimes I think I disapprove of ordination ceremonies, because they kill cows and buffaloes for the feast. They also

get drunk. Some ordinands also get drunk. Some disrobe after only fifteen days of ordination. So they became sinful instead of earning merit. When they die, they will go to hell because of the killing." The speaker did not notice his listener's face become pale at the words "they will go to hell because of the killing."

"When I ordained, no cows or buffaloes were killed. Luang Poh did not want anything like that," Phra Buahyao said fearfully.

"Yes, Uncle is an honest and very strict man. He won't allow singing or dancing during the ordination ceremony, since the loud noise would disturb those who are practicing. Once I went to a monastery for a friend's ordination ceremony. I forget the name ... "

"The name of your friend or the monastery?"

"... The monastery's. I can't forget my friend's name because it is the same as mine."

"And what happened at the ceremony?"

"The worst. They were all drunk and dancing wildly around the Uposatha Hall. They took no notice of the fact that they were in a consecrated area," Joi said.

"They probably thought they would make merit by acting like that. Lots of Buddhists still don't properly understand their religion. I myself only appreciated Buddhism when I become a monk."

"But I think it's a tradition. They behave like this until it becomes tradition. Don't you think some traditions are wrong? If they are, then following tradition can sometimes be wrong."

"It's true. I don't approve of many supposedly traditional Buddhist activities. For example, drinking alcohol during merit-making activities. Before performing the ceremony, the monk will always tell them to follow Buddhist teachings, at least the Five Precepts. But when the ceremony is over, they immediately start drinking without a thought for the precepts they have just followed. This means that they are sinning instead of making merit."

"Yes, sir, and when they kill cows and buffaloes to prepare for an ordination feast, they are also sinning." The speaker knew nothing about the background of the new monk, and he was unwittingly making Phra Buahyao feel more and more uncomfortable each time he spoke about killing.

"How long were you a novice?" the new monk asked. He did not want to talk about killing.

"Five years, sir, from the age of ten to fifteen."

"And you stayed here with Luang Poh for the whole five years?"

"Yes sir."

"Then you have gained much knowledge from him. Phra Maha Boon told me that Luang Poh is also an expert in magic."

"It's true, but he didn't teach anybody. He said this knowledge was useless, because it cannot help eradicate suffering. After he had met the Monk in the Forest and learned insight meditation he gave up magic."

"And he never used this knowledge?"

"Sometimes. He said magic was not real knowledge, so he used it only when it was necessary, say when someone was possessed by a spirit. He would use magic to exorcise the evil spirit. He also had a spell to help women give birth more easily. He would blow it into a bel fruit and give it to a pregnant woman. After eating the bel fruit she would have no problems. It was marvelous!"

"And a lifetime partner? Can he tell us who our real lifetime partner will be?" The new monk hoped that Joi would say no, but the man replied, "He can, he really can tell. In my case, I never dreamed that I would become Miss Juk's fiancée. Owing to my uncle's prediction I met Juk accidentally. Do you want to hear this story?"

"Tell me. I'm listening."

Joi had only begun when Phra Buahyao cut in. "You threw the alms food into the river? Wasn't that against the rules of discipline of the Order? It meant that you did not respect the alms you were given," the new monk said.

"My uncle said that it depended on our motivation. We were not throwing it away but feeding the fish. Many of them came and ate the food."

"I sympathize with his motives. He loves cleanliness, so he could not eat food that has been contaminated in that way."

"No, and at that time I hated Miss Juk very much. I had been angry at my uncle for many days. I thought he was trying to provoke me. I told him that he himself should marry Juk because I would not marry her."

"And now do you still want him to marry her?" asked the new monk, wryly.

"No. Anyone who wants to marry Juk must kill me first. Do you know that the Juk of today and the Juk of the past are absolutely different? As a small girl she was very dirty, but now she is as pretty as a nymph. You will see her in a few minutes. She will come with a nun to be initiated as a teacher's disciple. After the ceremony she will stay at the nuns' quarters for a week, while I stay with you."

"Then I'll be able to see who is prettier, your fiancée or Luang Poh's,"

Phra Buahyao said, carelessly letting the Abbot's secret out. He remembered that the Abbot had told him she would come to the monastery to arrange for construction of the bell tower.

"What do you mean? Does my uncle have someone special? That's quite impossible. I was with him for five years, and I never heard any such story. Maybe this happened after I disrobed," said Joi, doubtfully.

"I let the secret drop without thinking. Please don't tell Luang Poh, or I'll die."

"I won't do that, but you must tell me the story."

"But I've promised him not to reveal it to anybody. Please don't make me break my promise," Phra Buahyao implored Joi.

"Well, you can choose whether you will tell me or I will have to ask my uncle," said Joi, who clearly had the upper hand.

"Don't I have any other choice?"

"No, sir," Joi replied firmly. The new monk put his hands together at his chest and said quite loudly "Luang Poh, I apologize for breaking my promise. I am forced by Mr. Joi to do what I don't want to. May Mr. Joi alone be wrong."

"Why did you say that?" the man asked, startled.

"I told you that it's a secret, but you want to know anyway, so you are committing a wrong by forcing me to reveal it."

"Venerable sir, I would like to tell you honestly that I have never seen anyone like you since the day I was born. I think that my uncle is the brightest man in the world. Although you are not as bright as he is, you are still bright."

Phra Buahyao did not understand whether he was being admired or criticized, so he dared not feel glad.

"Please tell the story," the man reminded the new monk.

"I won't because I don't want you to be guilty of a sin," Phra Buahyao said, changing his mind.

"Then I'll go and ask my uncle."

The man was trying to browbeat the new monk, but Phra Buahyao was no longer afraid. He said, "You should go quickly, otherwise he won't have time to tell you."

Joi was speechless for a moment. It hadn't occurred to him that Phra Buahyao would say anything like this. Then he blurted out, "I knew you wouldn't be able to tell me the story, because it's not true. You pretend to know, but really you don't know anything."

The man thought that this would force the Abbot's story out of the

new monk, so he was very disappointed when Phra Buahyao said, "I would be very glad if you really thought that. Anyway, you were here for five years, did you ever see a beautiful woman come to meet Luang Poh?"

"Lots of them came, old maids and widows. Some were very, very beautiful, but others looked like ghosts."

"What do you mean?" the new monk asked.

"I mean that they were ugly. Anyway, my uncle was not interested in any of them. Sometimes he criticized them. There was one beautiful woman with a Ph.D. who came frequently and asked many worldly questions. She also dressed improperly, as if hoping to seduce him."

"If I were Luang Poh, I would have disrobed," said the new monk.

"No, you wouldn't. It was repugnant rather than attractive. I had never realized that a highly educated person could act like that."

"And what did the Abbot do?"

"At first he said nothing, but after she had behaved that way many times, he told her, 'Upasika, I know what you think about me, but you don't know what I think about you. If I wanted to disrobe, I would have done so long ago because my beloved is much more attractive than you. She is beautiful as well as good, and yet I was not moved by her beauty. Why should I be moved by you, when you are worthless in my eyes? It's a pity to see a well-educated person behaving like an ill-educated one.'"

"How can you remember so clearly?" Phra Buahyao interrupted. "Are you sure that you didn't make up these words?"

"Certainly not. These are not my words. I tell you that I remember distinctly," Joi affirmed.

"And what did that woman say?"

"What could she say? She left without saying a word, and she never came back. Do you think that women who cause monks to disrobe are bad?" the man asked the new monk.

"It's difficult to say. I'm sure that what they do is wrong, but I don't know if they will be reborn in hell. If you really want to know, you should ask Luang Poh yourself."

"I dare not do that. But still, you agree that women are the demons of the Holy Life?"

"Yes, but why have you fallen in love with Miss Juk since she also is a woman?" asked the new monk.

"My uncle taught me that, 'Without demons one cannot cultivate goodness.' I only want to cultivate good, sir," Joi answered loudly and clearly.

Chapter 14

Phra Buahyao and Joi arrived at the Abbot's lodging a few minutes before 6 p.m. Juk was there with a middle-aged nun whom Joi had not seen before. Both women prostrated to Phra Buahyao. Juk had brought with her an offering tray bearing flowers, incense-sticks, and candles.

"Have you been waiting long?" Joi asked his fiancée. Her white clothes made her look strange, although she had not shaved her head.

"I arrived just a few minutes before you came," she replied. The new monk stared at her and noticed that her lips were pink, not red like Phongphan's and Wonwilai's. He decided that city girls and country girls were different from each other in the color of their lips. The two sisters were also much more beautiful than this girl.

"Don't stare at my fiancée like that. I'm jealous," Joi said, teasing the new monk.

"Oh, she's your fiancée, is she? You didn't tell me that," Phra Buahyao teased back.

"Who could have realized that you wouldn't know? You are very clever, but you don't know she is my fiancée."

Juk did not like to hear the monk and the man bickering, so she introduced her fiancée to the nun. "Joi, this is the nun whom I stay with. She is the leader of the nunnery."

Joi saluted the nun with joined palms and said, "Please take good care of her."

"Don't worry. Somchai has told me that she is the fiancée of the Abbot's nephew," the nun said.

"How long have you been here in this monastery?" asked Joi. There were no nuns staying at Wat Ambhavan when he was there.

"I have been here for six years. I came from the monastery to the south of this one," she said, pointing her finger southward.

"Why did you move?"

"Staying there was unbearable. The monks and the novices lacked discipline and behaved badly and the nuns were always quarreling, so my friends and I asked to move here, and Luang Poh was kind enough to arrange the construction of the nuns' quarters for us. There are now about thirty nuns staying here," she explained.

"And how about the monks of this monastery? Are they all good?" asked Joi, intending to find fault, especially with Phra Buahyao.

"I can assure you only that Luang Poh is absolutely good. As for the others, I am not sure whether they are good or not," said the elderly nun.

"Upasika, I also have never done wrong as long as I have been here," protested the new monk.

"That's good for you, because it means you will be able to stay here a long time," the nun said frankly, leaving the new monk lost for words.

The Phra Khru joined them at 6 p.m. Everyone saluted him. As he was about to greet them, three visitors entered on their knees. Two were women, one extremely fat and looking very comical as she crawled on all fours. Having prostrated to the Abbot three times, the fat woman turned to the other two. "Papa, mama, this is Venerable Phra Khru," she said. "Salute him." The old couple did as their daughter commanded, and then she asked the Abbot, "Do you remember me, sir?"

"Yes, madam. I do remember Duang Suda. Hasn't the governor come with you?" the Phra Khru asked. Her husband was the governor of the province.

"No, sir. I have come from Tha Phra. I am bringing my parents to practice vipassana meditation. My father's name is Seng and my mother's name is Kim Ngor, sir," she replied. Her parents were of Chinese origin.

"It's good that you are bringing your parents to cultivate goodness. Your daughter is really good." The last sentence he addressed to Seng. The old man nodded in agreement.

"How long do you want your parents to stay here?" the Abbot asked Duang Suda.

"Seven days, sir," she replied. Then she asked her parents, "How about you?"

"It depends on you. I'll do whatever you want," the father answered his daughter. He had only one child in the world, so he did everything she asked. Neither he nor his wife had ever denied their daughter anything she

needed, from the time she was born until she had completed her bachelor's degree. Yet, their love did not spoil her for she was able to lead her life in a proper manner. Now she was married and had four sons. Her husband was a governor, a very high position. Her eldest son was going to be a doctor in the near future.

"Try to stay for seven days first, and if you want to, then you can extend your stay," she said.

"And when will you yourself come and practice?" the Abbot asked Duang Suda. She often came to the monastery to make merit by giving and by listening to the Doctrine, yet she had never found time to practice even once.

"I can't, sir. I am too busy to come. I'll wait until Eiam retires, then we'll come together." She meant her husband.

"I don't think it should be like that, because when that time comes you will excuse yourself again, saying that you have to look after your grandchildren. Some people say that they will come when their children grow up but when that time comes they still put it off, claiming that they can't because they have to look after their grandchildren and when their grandchildren grow up and have children of their own, the grandparents die without having acquired merit. I am afraid you will be like them."

"No, sir, I won't be like that. I have promised my husband that we won't be looking after our grandchildren. Their parents will have to do that."

"That means that you looked after your own children?"

This time Duang Suda smiled shyly and said, "My parents are very proud of their grandchildren, sir."

"I have only one daughter, and I felt that it was not enough to feed only one child, so I said I would take care of all her sons. Now I am tired of doing this," Kim Ngor said. She could speak Thai better than her husband, because she had many Thai friends.

"But when your grandchildren have their own children, perhaps you will take on this duty again," the Abbot prompted.

"No, sir. I promised my husband that we will practice every day at home. We will give up working, since we have worked hard all our lives. We have enough money to retire on. It's time to make merit for our future lives. We have been happy in this life owing to our morality, and we must try to prolong our happiness into the next life. If we are careless, we could be reborn in an unhappy realm," the old woman said.

"Excellent. That is the right way to think," the Abbot said. "It is rare to

find a person like you. Most of the people I see think differently. They are careless in life and they do not believe in karma. Yesterday, a retired general came here. He reported tearfully that his wife had run away with her lover, stealing his jewelry and his money. Why shouldn't she do that, since this general is seventy years old while his wife is only twenty-eight? I warned him about the law of karma and urged him not to marry her, but he would not listen to me.

"This general first came to see me twelve years ago. He asked me if he would have the chance to marry again. I asked him how old he was. 'Fifty-eight,' he answered. 'And how old is the lady?' 'Sixteen, sir. She is very charming. Her father is a sergeant on my staff. Her parents are willing to let her marry me,' the general told me. I mentally noted, 'perceiving,' three times and I was able to see the whole picture. What did I perceive? Do you know?" he asked Phra Buahyao.

"The law of karma, sir?"

"That is right. The general had committed an unwholesome act in his previous life, in particular violating the third of the Five Precepts. Remember that for whoever has violated the Five Precepts in his previous life, at least sixty per cent of that evil will come back to him in this life. For example, anyone who killed in his previous life must die very early in this life. Anyone who stole will be robbed of his wealth. Anyone who committed sexual misconduct will have a false wife or husband. Anyone who spoke falsely will not be trusted by others. Anyone who was a drunkard will have idiot children. I have investigated these cases. It is unavoidable karma."

"Excuse me sir. I don't understand the last case. Why should children suffer from the karma of their parents?" asked Duang Suda.

"I call it karmic sharing. It means that both parents and children committed evil together in their previous life. So they must suffer the consequences together in this life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. Please go on."

The Abbot continued. "I saw that this general had violated the third precept, so I asked him why he should marry a girl the same age as his granddaughter, and whether he had asked permission from his wife or not."

"He lied that he had separated from his wife long ago but I knew that he hadn't. I also knew that he had four other wives who had gone off with lovers. Only one was still with him. When I told him, he confessed, but he suspected that someone must have told me. I told him that I knew it for myself. He believed me and asked whether he should marry this girl or not. I replied that he should not since she would behave like his four other

wives. Then he asked me to help him. I said that I could not go against the law of karma and urged him to abandon his idea, but he refused. In the end, he married her, and two years later he retired.

"After his retirement the girl took a lover, but the general was not angry because he knew that this was the result of his karma. The girl intended to live with the general until he died because she wanted to inherit his wealth. But when she realized that he would probably live a long time, she stole his belongings and ran away with her lover. That's when the general came to see me and ask for help, but I could not do anything for him. I advised him to practice insight meditation to reduce his karma, but he refused." When the Abbot had finished, his listeners felt sad, but at the same time they thought themselves fortunate to have a chance to practice.

"And you? Will you stay here tonight or you will go home?" the Phra Khru asked Duang Suda.

"I'll go home, sir. My driver is waiting. I'll tell him to bring my parents' clothes here. Where will you let them stay, sir?"

"Your mother will stay in the nuns' quarters, and your father will stay with Phra Buahyao. Do not worry, I'll take good care of them," said the Abbot.

Duang Suda took a white envelope from her handbag and offered it to the Phra Khru, saying, "I want to donate this money to provide food for the meditators, sir."

The Abbot accepted and thanked her. Then she prostrated to him three times and prepared to leave. She said to her parents, "Papa, mama, I'll go now. Practice hard, don't be lazy, and don't forget to transmit your merits to me."

Hearing this, Phra Buahyao wondered who was really the daughter and who were the parents. A few minutes after Duang Suda left, the driver brought clothes for her parents and then left.

The Phra Khru allowed the two couples to be initiated as disciples, then he said, "Before practicing, it is essential for you to study the Scriptures, in order to understand the meaning of 'mind', 'sense-objects', and 'mindfulness.' These three words are very important. Phra Buahyao, please explain to them what the mind is."

"Mind is a state of consciousness, sir."

"And what are sense-objects?" the Abbot asked the elderly nun.

"They are the things to which the mind clings, sir."

"That is right. These sense-objects are objects of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind-objects. Do you understand?" he asked Seng and

aren't they? Do such monks really exist? I don't think Joi was lying, sir."

"There are monks who are even worse than this," answered the Phra Khru.

"Aren't they committing major sins, sir?"

"No, because originally they were not monks, but religious destroyers."

"Do they intend to destroy Buddhism?"

"Buddhism itself will not degenerate, although people are moving away from it. But some people and some groups, seeing monks behaving improperly, think that Buddhism is degenerating. People with poor understanding will think like this, because they are lacking in *yoniso-manasikara*."

"What is it that they are lacking, sir?" the new monk asked, not familiar with the term.

"Lacking in *yoniso-manasikara*, wise consideration. It means they are unable to think wisely, or not seeing things with wisdom, and it is caused by holding wrong views. Wise consideration is very important, because it is the source of all goodness. A person who has wise consideration can distinguish between monks and religious destroyers. Therefore, when he sees a bad monk, he will not abandon Buddhism, because he knows that such a person is certain to be a destroyer, not a monk."

"Does that mean that a person lacking in wise consideration is a fool?"

"Not really, because many such people are highly educated. They are often teachers, doctors, and engineers. They are smart, but in a worldly way. You will see in ten or twenty years' time that the number of such destroyers will increase. Some intelligent people will co-operate with them. Confusion will be widespread, because many people will not know what is right and what is wrong, since these 'monks' not only do not behave in the way the Buddha decreed, they also attack and distort the teaching of the Awakened One. Many people will be driven away from religion. And this is indeed very dangerous."

"How can we help to improve the situation?"

"Pardon me, did you say 'we'? No, we cannot do anything, Buahyao. We are only a drop in the ocean. Neither can those with political power, who are many thousands of times more powerful than we are. We have to leave it to the process of karma," said the Phra Khru sadly.

"Luang Poh, sir, now I'm very confused."

"Confused about what? You seem to be confused all the time."

"Karma, sir. Sometimes you say that we should not live our lives depending on our previously created karma. Sometimes you ask us just to let

go. That is why I'm so confused," the young monk explained.

"There is nothing to be confused about. I have already explained to you that karma is complicated. It is too difficult for lay people to understand. It is *acinteyya*."

"What is *acinteyya*, sir?" asked Phra Buahyao, seeming even more confused.

"Haven't you heard of it? I remember explaining this to you once. Why are you so forgetful?"

"You're right, sir. My memory used to be good, but now I come across so many confusing things that it fails easily. Could you please explain it to me once more, sir?"

The Phra Khru was silent, looking at the cabinet containing the Pali Canon. After a moment, he said, "Listening alone does not help you to remember. You must also see. There it is, in volume twenty-one of the Pali Canon. Open it up."

The new monk walked over to the cabinet. It took a long time before he found the right volume. Then he returned to his place.

"Which page is it on, Luang Poh?" he asked, not knowing how to find his way through the book.

"Page fool," said the abbot without smiling.

"Please, Luang Poh, don't scold me."

"You are too good to be scolded."

"Luang Poh, you are so clever and good!" exclaimed the young monk, nodding his head up and down.

"Clever?" This time it was the Phra Khru who was confused.

"You know how to strike first, and then give a pat on the back to comfort. First you say that I am stupid, then you say that I am good. What else can I call this?"

"Which would you rather be, stupid but good, or clever but bad?"

"I would prefer to be good and clever," answered Phra Buahyao confidently.

"That is not one of the two choices given. I want you to choose one of the two."

"Then I've got to choose to be stupid but good. I don't want to be clever but have to go to hell. And what about you?" the young monk asked.

"I choose neither of the two. Both of them are impossible, as I am already out of this condition."

"Does that mean that you are now beyond heaven and hell, beyond good and bad?" Phra Buahyao deduced.

"I think you want to know what acinteyya is," the abbot said, cutting him short. "Look at the Table of Contents. Find out what page it is on, and read it aloud to me."

Phra Buahyao opened the text and read aloud: "*Acinteyya is that which cannot or should not be thought of, the unthinkable, incomprehensible, impenetrable, that which transcends the limits of thought, and on which therefore one should not ponder. The four imponderables are: a Buddha's powers, the meditative absorptions, karmic results, and philosophical questions about the world, such as the origins of the universe. Whoever contemplates these four imponderables will go insane and be miserable.*"

"Do you still have any questions about karma?" asked the abbot when the new monk had finished reading.

"No, sir. I have no more doubts, and I don't want to think. I'm afraid of going insane and being miserable," answered Phra Buahyao soberly.

"Good. If you can think that way you will be happy. But believe me, we are the owners of our own deeds. We do not need to do any analysis. These religious destroyers will eventually reap the consequences of their own actions. Karma has consequences, whether the deeds are good or bad."

"Luang Poh, sir, I still have a small doubt. Why, in the Pali Canon, are many Buddhas mentioned? Isn't there only one Buddha?" asked the inquisitive disciple.

"There are many," the Phra Khru explained. "In one eon, there exist a number of Buddhas. In the present eon, there exist five Buddhas, and our Lord Buddha is the fourth."

"What are the names of the other four?"

"I am not certain. It is outside of my knowledge, but as far as I know, the five Buddhas of the present age are Kakusandha, Konagamana, Kassapa, Gotama, and Metteyya, the last one."

"He is called Phra Sri Arya, is that right?"

"That's right. In the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, it is said that Theravada Buddhism will last for 5,000 years. From then on will be the era of the religion of Phra Sri Arya. Now 2,516 years have already passed. There are only about 2,400 years left. It is said that the closer we come to the end of the 5,000 years, the more religion will degenerate and religious destroyers will multiply."

"Luang Poh, how long is one eon, sir?"

"It is believed that one eon is an extremely long time. In the analogy, there is a rocky mountain about ten miles in width, length, and height. Once every hundred years, it is touched by a fine linen cloth, until the moun-

tain wears away. But an eon is even longer than that."

"It seems too long to have an end. If that is so, then it must be very boring to wander in the cycle of birth and death throughout an eon."

"That it is. That is why I have tried to get out of this cycle. And so should you."

"When did this cycle of birth and death start, and when will it end?"

"Nobody knows when it began, and it will not end as long as sentient beings are still creating karma."

"If sentient beings stop creating karma, it will end. Is that so?"

"It should be that way, but in practice it is impossible. It is impossible for sentient beings to stop creating karma."

They were silent for a moment, then Phra Buahyao asked, "Luang Poh, sir. If a monk hires somebody to kill someone, will he go to hell, and why must he do so?"

"What is your opinion? Will he go to hell? Do not forget that the Buddha has said that we are the owners of our own deeds, and will receive the consequences."

"But if the monk himself doesn't kill, it should not be a sin."

"Why not? Even if he does not commit the act himself, the intention and the speech are his, although the action is another. In this case, if it can be proven that he is guilty, he will have to give up his monkhood. It is really sad to have worked very hard to enter monkhood, but end up going to hell instead. Take the case of the assistant provincial dean who hired a man to kill the provincial dean, who was his own teacher."

"Why did he do that, sir?"

"Because he expected to succeed him. His teacher had lived too long, and he wanted the position. I went to the teacher's cremation, because we had been acquainted. Haven't you heard this story? It made big headlines. It was very sad."

"Was the assistant provincial dean arrested, sir?"

"We came to know about it because he had been arrested. He should not have done it. The cause of his evil deed was greed for gain. When a monk is obsessed with gain, he will end up badly like that." The Phra Khru used the Chinese words for "end up badly."

"You are clever, Luang Poh. You can speak many languages: Chinese, English, Thai." Phra Buahyao couldn't help expressing his admiration.

"I have done some good," the Abbot said proudly.

"What kind of karma is it that makes you so able, sir?" asked the new monk. "I want to be clever."

"If you are eager to know, read the Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta, the section where Subha Todeyyaputta visits the Buddha at Jetavana and asks Him why, among human beings, some are high and some low, some long-lived and some short-lived, some handsome and some plain, some rich and some poor, and so on. The Buddha answers that it is the result of their heritage from the past. Read it if you have a chance to. It is in the Pali Canon, Volume 14. After reading it, perhaps you will do good. When I was young, I was very mischievous and created a lot of bad karma. But since becoming a monk, I have slowly expiated it. I am trying to make up for all my previous evil deeds within this life."

"You mean that you aren't going to be born again?"

"Speaking sincerely, I do not want to be born again, even for one more life, but this depends on conditions. If I have not expiated all of my karma, I will be reborn again, whether I wish to or not."

"What about now? Have you almost finished your expiation?" Phra Buahyao tried very hard to get an answer.

"It is none of your business. Do not bother me with this question. I will not fall into your trap."

The student made a long face when he realized his teacher knew what he was up to, but he continued to ask, "Luang Poh, sir. I still have some doubts about that story you told me."

"Which story?" the teacher asked, looking a little annoyed.

"That the assistant provincial dean hired a man to kill his teacher, hoping to get his position. I feel that it is not a great sin, because he was not the one who committed the murder."

"Well, I'll explain this to you. Whether killing is a great sin or not depends on whether or not all the five factors are present. The more of the factors that are present, the greater the sin. The five factors are: a living sentient being, the knowledge that it is a living sentient being, the intention to kill, the attempt to kill, and the death of the sentient being because of that attempt to kill. I will tell a story so that you can analyze whether this killing contained the five factors or not. This story has been passed down, and it is said to be a true story."

"And do you yourself say that it's a true story?"

"What?"

"Do you say that this is a true story? I have never heard you say 'I say' even once, always 'it is said, it is said'."

"If you won't listen to the story, I do not have to tell it," the teacher said.

"I'm listening, sir. Please tell the story," said the pupil, with joined palms.

The teacher began: "A long, long time ago ... "

"How long ago was that?" the listener interrupted.

"I don't know how long ago it was, but it was a long time," said the teacher patiently.

"You have such a good memory, sir, even though it happened a long time ago ... "

This time the Phra Khru's patience came to an end. He delivered his ultimatum: "Buahyao, if you are unruly I will not tell the story."

"Sorry, sir. Please continue," said Phra Buahyao.

So the Phra Khru began:

"Once upon a time there was a Luang Ta living at a monastery. One morning, on his way to the lavatory, he saw a big turtle crawling along the path. Upon seeing the turtle, he felt a strong craving to eat turtle soup, so he turned back to his lodging, took out a scripture and 'preached' loudly, 'Just now I went to the lavatory and saw a big turtle crawling along. Just now I went to the lavatory and saw a big turtle crawling along ...' He kept repeating this, intending to make his lay attendant hear it. Now the lay attendant thought that Luang Ta was simply chanting, so he did not pay any attention. Angered at being ignored this way, Luang Ta shouted loudly: 'Just now I went to the lavatory and saw a big turtle crawling along.' This time his lay attendant understood that Luang Ta wanted to eat turtle soup, so he went and caught the turtle crawling clumsily along the path.

"To cook turtle soup, the turtle must be boiled alive. So the attendant made a fire, then filled a rice pot with water and put it on the stove. When the water was boiling, he dropped the turtle in. But it happened that the turtle was too big for the pot and fell out. The lay attendant tried to put it back, only to see it fall out again. At that, Luang Ta (who was watching all this) became worried that he might miss out on his turtle curry. So he picked up the scripture again, and read loudly, 'Just now I went to the lavatory and saw a big turtle crawling along. If that rice pot is too small, why don't you use the bigger one?' Hearing this, the lay attendant poured boiling water from the rice pot into the bigger one, put it on the stove and pushed the turtle in. In the end, Luang Ta had turtle curry as he wished. That is the end of the story. Now tell me, how many of the factors I mentioned earlier correspond to what Luang Ta did?"

"All of them, sir." This time Phra Buahyao answered without wasting any time to think.

"But he did not kill the turtle himself. How can you say all the five factors were there?" the Phra Khru tested him.

"Certainly, sir. The turtle was a living sentient being and Luang Ta knew that fact but he still wanted to eat it, which means that he had the intention to kill. He also attempted to kill it by 'preaching' suggestively that the rice pot was too small. Eventually the turtle died as a result of his attempt to kill."

"Clever boy." Phra Buahyao was pleased to hear that, but not for long, as the Abbot continued, "It's a pity we only see your intelligence once in a long while. Why didn't you consider the previous story the same way?"

"Which story, sir?"

"The one about the assistant provincial dean. Don't you think it is sinful even though he did not commit murder himself? The five factors were all present. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, sir. I should not have been so foolish."

"I agree. In fact you lack intelligence." The atmosphere was changing, so Phra Buahyao didn't argue with the abbot. He wanted to learn more from his teacher.

"Luang Poh, sir. I am still in doubt about one thing." No sooner had he spoken than the teacher stopped him.

"Slowly, slowly. Today we have already had a long talk. I know what you are going to ask me about. We will continue later. There is no more time today. You should go back to your lodging and continue your practice. Try harder, so that you will be able to repay all your debts," the Phra Khru concluded, giving his listener something to think about.

Chapter 16

Phra Buahyao had been trying for many days, but he had found no chance to ask the Abbot about the problem that was occupying his mind. The Phra Khru was never free enough these days to allow his disciples to question him privately as he had previously. The further his reputation spread, the more disciples he had. He was now receiving many invitations to deliver religious discourses at various institutions, so that he almost never had any time free.

Since Mr. Srist had presented him with a van, the Abbot could travel much more easily, with Somchai as his chauffeur. The lay attendant said that in the days when the Phra Khru had no transport, he used to hire Mr. Koo to take him where he wanted to go, but Mr. Koo had often made him miss his appointments. For example, if Mr. Koo had a bad dream, in the morning he would tell the Abbot that he was unable to drive that day for fear of an accident. No matter how the Abbot pleaded with him, Mr. Koo would refuse. It was usually too late to hire anybody else, since the appointed time would have passed before new arrangements could be made.

No matter how fearful Mr. Koo was, he was unable to escape the law of karma forever. In the end, he met with a fatal accident, because he had not kept his word. It was said that during his younger days, Mr. Koo had earned his living by plying along the Chao Phraya River, buying goods in Bangkok and selling them in the provinces and vice versa. His enterprise grew so well that he owned two boats, one of which he used as a passenger vessel.

Once when he was traveling back from Bangkok late at night, the steersman fell asleep, causing the boat to hit a shoal in mid-river and capsize. The steersman himself and five or six passengers were drowned. As Mr. Koo struggled in the water, he was thinking of his mother and his wife. The

latter was then pregnant with their first child. He made a vow that if he survived this incident, he would join the Order for a rainy season to make merit and to transmit it to his enemies.

Miraculously, he survived. His wife soon gave birth to a daughter, and he busied himself with his work in order to support his family, forgetting about his vow. Later he sold his boats to buy a car, and he plied his trade in the neighborhood of Wat Ambhavan.

After that, he often had bad dreams. He dreamed that the Lord of the Underworld blamed him for not keeping his word, and warned him that if he persisted in refusing to become a monk, he would break his neck in a car accident. Mr. Koo told the Phra Khru about his bad dreams, and the Abbot insisted that he had to fulfill his vow, but he still procrastinated. Moreover, he begged the Abbot not to tell his mother and wife about the dreams. That is why whenever he had a bad dream he would not drive the following morning.

Many years had passed in this way when Mr. Koo's daughter, having reached the age of twenty-one, made plans to get married. Mr. Koo started having bad dreams more frequently, and the Phra Khru urged him again to join the Order, for the Abbot knew that if Mr. Koo did not become a monk, he would surely die. Mr. Koo was unyielding. He insisted that if he became a monk, nobody would take care of his family.

In fact, Mr. Koo could have joined the Order, because his children were grown up. Apart from his refusal to ordain, he also asked the Phra Khru to keep the matter completely secret. Not long after his final refusal, Mr. Koo had a car accident, and his neck was broken, just as he had dreamed. The Phra Khru was saddened by the incident, though he knew well that it was the law of karma that had caused Mr. Koo to die like that. Mr. Koo had to die a pitiful death because he had not kept his word.

"Venerable Brother, Luang Poh told me to bring you an invitation," Somchai told Phra Buahyao after the monk had finished his practice.

"Inviting me to his lodging, is he?" the Vietnamese monk asked with joy, since he realized that now he would have a chance to question the Phra Khru about the problem that had been on his mind for many days.

"No, sir. He told me to invite you to chant at a wedding ceremony. They have invited three monks from our monastery and six from another. Luang Poh wants you and Phra Maha Boon to accompany him. He also said that you should bring your shoulder bag and ceremonial fan with you."

"Shall I go now?" asked the new monk eagerly.

"Wait. Luang Poh said he would go at 5 p.m. It's only 3 p.m. now. You

can go to his quarters a few minutes before five and wait there."

"And Phra Maha Boon, does he know about this?"

"He does, sir. I informed him before I came here." With that, the lay attendant returned to the Abbot's quarters.

Phra Buahyao spent much more time than usual taking his bath. This would be his first chance to participate in a wedding ceremony, and he could not help feeling excited. After bathing, he dressed in neat, clean robes, and carrying his shoulder bag and ceremonial fan, he walked to the Abbot's quarters. He had been sitting there for about ten minutes when Phra Maha Boon arrived. The junior monk then paid respect to his adviser by prostrating three times.

"Have you been waiting long, Buahyao?" Phra Maha Boon asked.

"For a little while, Venerable Brother. I'm glad to see you. I would like to ask you something."

"Please do so. I will answer you if I can. How far have you practiced? I've heard that you are Luang Poh's favorite," he said.

"Not really. Luang Poh is kind to me because I am a fool. He takes pity on me. If I were clever like you, I would certainly be left on my own."

Phra Buahyao tried to please his senior, who answered, "You will be able to advance fast. When I was new here, he also took care of me for some months before he let me do the practice by myself. He is the most wonderful teacher. I respect him deeply." Phra Maha Boon was filled with admiration for his teacher's kindness. Phra Buahyao understood him well, because he felt the same.

"Venerable Brother, I have never been invited 'out' before. I am so excited that I feel almost overcome by anxiety. I am afraid that I might not behave properly. Could you please give me some advice?"

"I'll be glad to. Don't worry. Follow Luang Poh's advice; for example, when we sit, we sit in order of seniority as a monk. I guess you have to sit at the end of the row, since you joined the Order last. Don't let nervousness get hold of you. You can chant the ceremonial holy verses, can't you?"

"Yes, sir. But I'm not sure whether I'll be able to remember them during the chanting."

"You should remember them all, otherwise we will be embarrassed to be from the same monastery as you. One thing you can do is to lower your voice when chanting the parts you are unsure of. Nobody will know because we hide our faces behind the ceremonial fans while chanting," the senior monk advised.

"I don't know how nervous I will be if ... "

"If what?" Phra Maha Boon asked when the junior monk broke off.

"If ... there are girls in the audience."

"Of course there will be. At least the bride and a few bridesmaids. If they know there is a young monk coming, many girls may turn up. I feel that you might have to give up your monkhood this time," his senior teased.

"I am not afraid of that. What I fear more is my nervousness. How can I control myself?"

"Well, you have to note how you feel. Make use of your practice. Keep your self-control. Remember that if you cause any embarrassment, Luang Poh might not take you anywhere in the future."

"I'll try my best not to, so that I can go out with Luang Poh again."

"But traveling a lot does not benefit one's practice, Buahyao, because the mind wanders about and encounters other sense-objects, so it isn't remaining focused on the meditation object. If you are able to take note immediately, there is no harm. Look on it as an exercise for training the mind," Phra Maha Boon advised, as he himself had experienced the same problem before.

At 5 p.m., the Phra Khru came down from upstairs. The two monks paid respects with joined palms, then followed him to where Somchai was waiting with the van. The Abbot got into the front, next to the driver, leaving the two monks to sit in the back seat. Somchai closed all the doors and set off for the Asia Highway, turning left toward the city center, north of the monastery. After twenty minutes, they reached the junction with the road to the city center and went south about two kilometers to the pier. From there they would cross to the house on the other side of the river where the wedding celebration was to be held.

"Somchai, please wait here on this bank. No need to go across with us," the Phra Khru commanded before getting out of the van to wait near the bank for the one boat that was for hire.

In a short while, a woman rowed her boat back after ferrying some passengers across the river.

"Luang Poh, please come aboard. Going to the celebration?" In this district, everyone knew one another.

"Can you take three, or only one at a time?" the Abbot asked the woman. She was perhaps not older than twenty, and this work required a lot of strength, because of the strong currents in the Chao Phraya River during this twelfth month. The river looked wider than usual. Phra Buahyao had to note, "*Embarrassment*," when his eyes met hers.

"Yes, I can take three," the young woman answered.

"Is that another oar you have?" Phra Maha Boon pointed to an oar lying near the front of the boat. "Well, I will help you row the boat to make it easier for you." He went to the front of the boat and deftly picked up the oar.

When the other two monks got in, the woman began rowing, with Phra Maha Boon in the bow and herself at the stem, and the Phra Khru and Phra Buahyao in the middle.

"What time do you go home? I am going back at 8 p.m.," the Phra Khru said. The house was several minutes' walk from the pier.

"My husband relieves me after six, and he stops working at half past eight," she said.

"She is married!" the new monk told himself with relief. Reaching the other shore, the Phra Khru asked about the fare.

"Please don't pay me. Give me a chance to make merit."

"It is a sin to exploit someone. That you have strong faith is a good deed. I want to pay you."

"Fifty satang each, Luang Poh, sir. Just give me one baht." The woman refused to charge another fifty satang. The Abbot gave her two baht, saying, "In that case, I would like to give your children one baht so they can buy some sweets. Thank you for your help." The woman paid him respect with joined palms and thanked him. Then she rowed her boat away to collect passengers from the other bank.

The Windy Restaurant was well known in the village. It was on the riverbank next to the pier. At that time of day it was packed with customers. At one table next to the walkway were some men getting together to drink, with lots of side-dishes, glasses, and liquor bottles littering the table. As he walked past the table, the Phra Khru mentally noted, "*perceiving*," and whispered to Phra Buahyao, "Believe me, Buahyao, the men at that table will fight violently after they're all drunk tonight. We will certainly see violence on the way back."

"How do you know, Luang Poh, sir?" the new monk asked as usual, though in fact he knew the answer well.

"I know it. Wait and see for yourself!"

The three monks walked past the restaurant to their destination. After the auspicious chanting was over, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan said goodbye to the host and left with his two monks. The other six monks didn't have to cross the river, since their monastery was on the same bank as the house where the wedding was performed. On the way back, Phra Maha Boon asked Phra Buahyao whether he had overcome his anxiety or not.

"Almost. I have to thank you for your advice, which I kept in mind all the time. The bridesmaids were so pretty that they made me nervous."

The Phra Khru could not help interrupting them when he heard that. "I get the impression that you are always admiring pretty women. Don't you know that women are the enemies of the holy life?"

Phra Buahyao pulled his leg again by answering, "Yes, sir, I know it, but it can't be helped."

"All right, go ahead and talk like that, and do not say I did not warn you against women if anything happens." The Abbot was annoyed.

"I sense that you want to leave the Order soon, right?" Phra Maha Boon asked.

"Yes, sir. I'd like to get married, seeing others this way," confessed the young monk.

"And you think you can get married?"

"Certainly, sir. Several monks at Wat Ambhavan were not as handsome as I am, but they were able to disrobe and get married. So why can't I get married too?"

"It does not depend on your looks but your karma. If you have not created karma with anyone, you do not have to expiate it. Married couples have created karma together. You have no one. In this life you will have to remain single," the Abbot explained. Unfortunately, his explanation upset the new monk a great deal.

On reaching the pier, they had to wait for the boat, which had just left for the other shore, and wouldn't come back for a few minutes.

The waxing moon was shining in the sky. The men at the table near the walkway were still there, talking more and more loudly, since by now they were quite drunk. All of a sudden, one shouted angrily and very drunk-enly, "What son of a bitch did that? He must have rotten guts. What a foul stink!"

"Shut up, it's only natural. What about you, you son of a bitch, don't you ever do it?" the man sitting next to him retorted angrily. The Phra Khru whispered to Phra Buahyao, "Wait and see some violence."

"Why don't you stop them, Luang Poh?" the new monk said, afraid that he might be hurt in the violence.

"It is no use talking to a drunkard. He has lost all his senses. You might end up getting injured," the Phra Khru replied. The quarrel became more intense, with exchanges of cursing and foul words. Eventually the men divided into two sides and a fist fight began.

"Luang Poh, sir, what are we going to do?" Phra Buahyao's voice shook

and his legs trembled.

"Do not worry. You are safe with me." The new monk glanced quickly at the table. He saw a man break another's head with a bottle, causing blood to gush out. The victim lay there in a spreading pool of blood.

"Luang Poh, I fear I am going to faint." The new monk felt his heart miss a beat and his legs shake terribly, since he had never seen human blood before, only cattle blood.

"Make a mental note, Buahyao," Phra Maha Boon advised.

"You have failed, after all your practice. You must practice more. Here's the boat," the Phra Khru said, pointing to the approaching ferry.

The Abbot and his two monks then climbed into the boat. This time Phra Maha Boon's help was not needed, because the oarsman was a strong young man. Sitting down in the boat, the Phra Khru began, "You see, Buahyao, this is the disadvantage of losing self-control. If those men had been insight meditators, that incident of violence and bloodshed would not have happened."

"I believe that the cause of the fight was not someone breaking wind," said Phra Maha Boon. "In fact, it was liquor. In drunken men's eyes, an elephant is the size of a pig."

"All people, when they are drunk, act the same way. That is why the Awakened One taught the discipline of avoiding intoxicants which cause heedlessness. This precept is the most important, because if you violate it, then you can easily violate all the others. I wish that everyone would practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, so that they could keep their mindfulness."

"Luang Poh, sir, some people like to live without mindfulness," said Phra Maha Boon. "That's why, although they realize that liquor brings heedlessness, they still drink it."

"These people are pitiful."

"Why? I don't think we should pity bad people," Phra Buahyao interrupted.

"You do not understand. Bad people deserve our pity. They do not realize that hell is waiting for them because they live in heedlessness. Most people today lack mindfulness. It is a great pity that they are born as human beings, but never do anything useful."

Having disembarked, the three monks walked up to the van, whose doors had been opened by Somchai.

"Have you been waiting long?" the Phra Khru asked him.

"Just long enough for one nap, sir. There are a lot of mosquitoes. In

this cool weather, there shouldn't be so many insects," the lay attendant grumbled.

In the van, Phra Maha Boon resumed their conversation. "Mindfulness is so important, sir. Even near the time of his passing away, the Awakened One warned all monks to live with great mindfulness."

"Yes, during his lifetime, he taught about mindfulness very often. He explained it by analogy this way:

"Just as all the footprints of living beings are surpassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the footprint of the elephant is considered to be the mightiest among them, so all meritorious qualities have zeal as their foundation, and zeal—in practicing mindfulness—is considered to be the mightiest of these qualities."

"Luang Poh, sir, you are a walking Pali Canon," said Phra Buahyao. Then he raised a doubt: "How can we be sure that the Canon is really the Buddha's words when the Enlightened One passed into Nibbana over two thousand years ago?"

"Buddhists should believe in the Pali Canon. I do not really understand you, Buahyao. You should doubt what is dubious, and not what is not. It seems that you like to swim against the current. Let me put it this way. The Buddha's teachings are a challenge. If you do not believe, you have to investigate them. Then you will discover that his teachings are completely true." Now the Phra Khru was "preaching outside the pulpit."

"I believe the Buddha's teachings. Investigation is not necessary. I know that Luang Poh has investigated it all, but I can't help feeling my doubts," the listener answered softly.

Somchai drove away from the city center and turned on to the Asia Highway. It took about thirty minutes before the journey ended at the Abbot's quarters. Phra Buahyao took this opportunity to ask, "Are you going anywhere tomorrow, sir?"

"Oh, yes. Tomorrow there is a wedding ceremony. We have to be there at 7 a.m. to chant the verses. After that we shall have breakfast and return. At 10 a.m., I shall have visitors. They will come to donate a meeting hall, costing millions." His last sentence was addressed to Phra Maha Boon.

"Did they write to inform you of this?" Phra Maha Boon asked the Abbot.

"No."

"How do you know, sir?" asked Phra Buahyao, although he shouldn't have.

"My mental notation 'perceiving' told me this morning," the Abbot

answered. He knew that Phra Buahyao had more questions to pursue him with, so he cut him short, saying, "Wait until tomorrow. I will allow you and Maha Boon to entertain the visitors too. If you have any questions, ask me after that."

Phra Buahyao was overjoyed, but Phra Maha Boon felt indifferent, since for him, pleasure and displeasure were the same.



Chapter 17

On returning from the next morning's wedding ceremony, the Phra Khru went alone to his room on the upper floor of his quarters and began to write his Manual for Vipassana Meditation Practice. After a few minutes, Somchai came to tell him that some visitors were waiting for him downstairs.

"Call Phra Buahyao and Phra Maha Boon to come here," he ordered, then continued to write for some time while waiting for the two monks to come.

Soon Somchai came back with the two monks. The Phra Khru came down, received the respects of everyone present, and then turned to the four visitors. "Good day. Where are you from?" the Abbot asked the man sitting in front.

"I am from Chiang Mai, sir."

"And you?"

"I am from Phuket, sir," the man next to him replied. The third was from Kanchanaburi, and the fourth was from Rayong.

"It rarely happens that four men from the four directions come here at the same time. How have you come to meet here? Did you arrange to meet each other here?"

"No, sir. We met by chance just at the turn-off to the temple. It's really strange that we met there. As soon as my car left the Asia Highway, I saw three other Mercedes Benzes, the same model and each with a driver. If the cars' colors had been the same, I would have had to put it in the newspaper," reported the man from Chiang Mai.

"I believe that there are stranger things here than this. Would you believe that you were all born on the same day, in the same month and the same year? Let us check to see if this is true," said the Abbot.

"Really, sir?" said the man from Chiang Mai. "I must find out." He asked the man from Phuket his birthday and told him, "I was born on 27 March 1928."

"That's my birth date, too," the other three exclaimed simultaneously, never having thought that they would encounter three other people sharing the same birthday at the same time. The four men could not understand this coincidence, and neither could Phra Maha Boon or Phra Buahyao. But the Phra Khru knew that this was due to the law of karma. These four men from the North, South, East, and West would perform a deed together here at Wat Ambhavan—a good deed.

"Now it is lunch time. Please have your meal before we continue our talk," the Phra Khru invited, asking Somchai to lead the way to the dining hall. Phra Maha Boon and Phra Buahyao went out for their lunch too, while the Abbot went upstairs to continue his writing until the monks and the four visitors returned.

At the dining hall, only one table of food had been prepared, since this was the period after the end of the Rains Retreat. There were fewer lay disciples than usual, so the cook had sent food in tiffin carriers to their rooms to save time.

"Welcome," the hospitable cook invited them, helping to serve the four guests while Somchai fetched them glasses of water.

"Please take as much as you like. Luang Poh will be pleased," the cook told the guests, smiling widely in her willingness to please. The four men felt great warmth, as if they had returned home after a long absence.

"I feel that this monastery is rather unusual. Do you feel the same way?" the man from Phuket asked. He felt as familiar with the other three as if they had known each other for a long time, although they had just met that morning. They all seemed to share this feeling. The man from Chiang Mai remarked, "It feels like a dream. What an incredible and miraculous event this is. I myself have never visited a temple, and never had any faith in monks, because some monks nowadays do not lead a respectable life," he lowered his voice while saying this, for fear that the cook and the lay attendant would hear him.

"I used to love making merit, but after an incident with a Chao Khun, I stopped completely," said the man from Kanchanaburi.

"Which Chao Khun?" the man from Rayong asked.

"Chao Khun" He mentioned the name of a monk who is widely respected by the people of Bangkok, and whose lay devotees include many well-known politicians.

“Was the incident so bad that it made you stop respecting monks?”

“Not really, but I lost all my faith. It was like this. My elder brother was a government minister, and a disciple of the Chao Khun. He often invited the monk to his house for merit-making ceremonies. Once, on his birthday, he invited him some time in advance. I was asked to pick him up on that day. That’s my usual duty. But this time my wife had driven our Mercedes Benz to her beauty salon, so I had to drive my daughter’s Toyota. Can you believe it? When I led this monk to the car and he saw that it was a Toyota, he asked me why I hadn’t brought the Mercedes Benz. After I had told him the reason honestly, he hesitated, not wanting to get into the car. He told me to wait, and disappeared into his quarters. After a while, another monk came out and said he would stand in for the Chao Khun. He said that the Chao Khun was fussy. If it wasn’t a Mercedes Benz, he wouldn’t go. All the monks in that monastery knew well that he was obsessed with gain, but nobody dared to warn him, because he was the Abbot. My brother was cross over that incident. In the end, we stopped respecting monks, and never gave alms from then on.”

“I wouldn’t believe your story if the same thing hadn’t happened to me, too. I know that monk well, and I got the same treatment. I don’t know why I’ve come here, really,” said the man from Rayong.

“I hope this temple won’t disappoint us. I have great faith in Luang Poh. Maybe he has attained the divine eye. That’s why he knows so much about us. I would like to give alms here. It must be my previous good karma, otherwise I wouldn’t have thought of coming here, since there are many temples in Phuket.”

They broke off their conversation, as the food was very good. After they finished, Somchai led them back to where the Phra Khru and the other two monks were waiting. The Abbot said, “Monks at this monastery are different from elsewhere. If we are invited and we’re free from other engagements, we will go, no matter what the transport is. Sometimes we even go on foot.” The four men glanced at each other, wondering how he knew what they had been talking about.

“Not all monks in Thailand behave like that Chao Khun. There are a great many respectable monks. Don’t be misled,” the Phra Khru continued when he saw the expressions on the men’s faces. “You’d better go and invite the drivers to go and have their lunch,” he ordered Somchai.

“Luang Poh, how do you know all this?” the man from Rayong asked.

“You had better get rid of your doubts. Luang Poh knows everything he wants to know,” Phra Maha Boon told them. Phra Buahyao then added,

"Luang Poh can mentally note 'perceiving'." The four men understood what the first monk had said, but not Phra Buahyao's words.

"Well, now that you are all full, tell me what brought you here, since you haven't told each other."

"We met here, sir. I dreamed that a woman told me that donating towards a meeting hall at Wat Ambhavan would be an act of great merit, and that three former friends would join me in this good deed."

The man from Rayong had not finished his statement when he was interrupted by the man from Kanchanaburi. "Was she a twenty-year-old girl, with a dark complexion, sharp features and long hair?"

"Yes, wearing a long, dark blue skirt and a long-sleeved white blouse?" continued the one from Chiang Mai, even as the man from Phuket was asking, "Was she named Mae Kalong?"

In short, all four men had had the same dream. The Phra Khru was surprised that Mae Kalong had such great faith. His "perceiving" had told him that these visitors would come, but not about Mae Kalong.

"Is there a woman named Mae Kalong in this temple?" the man from Phuket asked. The Phra Khru did not tell them about Mae Kalong, for fear that these men would refuse to visit the monastery again if he did. He said softly, "Yes, but she dislikes meeting people. Don't trouble her. Even after our lengthy talk, I still don't know your names. Why don't you introduce yourselves?" the Abbot said, trying to divert the conversation from the subject of Mae Kalong. Phra Buahyao did not know who Mae Kalong was.

"I am Boonchai." The man from Chiang Mai introduced himself first.

"My name is Sakchai. I am well known in Kanchanaburi."

"People in Rayong call me 'Chai'. My full name is Vichai."

"They call me 'Chai'." The man from Phuket introduced himself last.

"What is your full name?" Phra Maha Boon asked.

"Just Chai, sir," he answered.

"Then I know what I should name the meeting hall. I am sure you will agree with me," said the Phra Khru.

"What is the name?" Mr. Vichai asked.

"Caturachai— 'Four Chais'—Meeting Hall. Does it sound appropriate?" There was silence, then Mr. Boonchai asked the Abbot, "We still don't know your name, sir."

"Didn't Mae Kalong tell you?"

"No, sir. She mentioned only the name and location of the monastery," replied Mr. Sakchai.

"Luang Poh's name is Charoen," said Phra Maha Boon. "Venerable

Phra Khru Charoen, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan."

"Then my suggestion is that the meeting hall should be called 'Charoenchai.' That is Luang Poh's name first, followed by ours," said Mr. Vichai. The others wholeheartedly agreed with him. As a result, the name suggested by Luang Poh had to be dropped.

"Now that we have the name, what about the plan? Will you do it, or let us manage by ourselves?" Mr. Sakchai asked.

"I will plan it myself, since you dropped the name I suggested. I will make up for that on this point. After the plan is finished, I will let you see it. If you want to make any changes, you can. I am not a dictator." Hearing his words, the four men felt happy, and their faith in the Phra Khru increased.

"There won't be anything to disagree about. It's all up to you. I am happy that the name I suggested was accepted," said Mr. Vichai, supported by his three friends.

"As for the expenses, the four of us will be responsible," concluded Mr. Boonchai.

"I would like to suggest that a *kathina* ceremony should be performed for the purpose, to provide a chance for others to make merit. It is a traditional belief: one should not be selfish with merit-making, but make it open to all, especially the poor—twenty-five or fifty satang each would be enough. Then in the next life you will have followers to help you," the Phra Khru suggested.

Phra Buahyao interrupted, "But the *kathina* season has already passed."

"It can be done next year, as the construction will not be completed in one year. Isn't that so?" the Abbot asked Mr. Chai.

"Yes, sir. It is up to you to decide the appropriate time. I myself won't have time to come here often. I am going to leave some money with you. If the money runs short, please contact me at the address shown on this card." Saying this, he signed a personal check for three hundred thousand baht and offered it to the Abbot with his name card. The other three men did the same, in total agreement.

The Phra Khru accepted their offer and said jokingly, "This is a tremendous amount of money. What if I cashed these checks and ran away to get married?"

"It's up to you, sir," answered Mr. Sakchai, but he began to get worried, as did the other three.

The Abbot then made a suggestion: "I think we should open a joint bank account under our five names, so that we will all feel happy."

"That's a good idea," said Mr. Vichai, "but it will be troublesome when it's time to withdraw money. We all trust you, sir."

"So I will appoint a temple committee to oversee this matter. All committee members will be informed of any withdrawals. I am a meticulous person, and I like to do things with great care, particularly where it concerns money. Many laymen and monks get bad reputations because of money. At one monastery that I don't want to name, the Abbot took the donations and ran off to get married."

"Can such a deed lead to hell, sir?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"Certainly. It is the same as fraud. Donated money is intended to make merit, not for the Abbot to get married on."

Hearing these words, the four visitors were still worried. The Abbot therefore concluded, "Let's do it this way. It will take a few months for me to complete the design, as I am hardly ever free. After the design stage, I have to tender out the plan and look for a contractor. That certainly will take months. You had better keep the money with you for now. I will inform you then. I do not want to keep a lot of money with me. Please understand my position."

Finally, the four rich men took back their checks, but promised that they would hold to their commitment to build a hall. When they said goodbye to the Phra Khru, he gave them his blessing, "May all of you live in happiness and prosperity, diligence, and perseverance. The most important thing is that you live by honest means. If you earn your living in a dishonest way, you will face misfortune as fast as you get rich. Remember my words."

"Why did you return the money? That's more than a million baht," exclaimed Phra Buahyao after the four men had left.

"I felt that they still had some doubts. One must have a clear mind to make merit. Do not worry, they will come back."

"I am relieved to hear that. You mentioned an Abbot just now. Where does he live, sir? What is the name of the monastery, and what is he doing now?"

"Why do you want to know? Even if I told you, you would not know him."

"But it would be useful for me to know, because if he does good, I will follow his example, but I won't if it's the opposite."

"You have a good reason, but I will not tell you anything. It is his life, whether he does good or not."

"So, you're leaving it up to the law of karma?" the young monk teased.

Since coming to stay here, he had heard 'the law of karma' so many times that the words rang in his ears.

"You can wait and see. In the future, those who dishonor their monkhood will be disrobed. Some will be put in prison, and some will commit suicide. If we don't call this the law of karma, what else should we call it?"

"We must call it the law of karma, sir," the Vietnamese monk murmured.

"As a matter of fact, I do not want to discuss this subject. It upsets me, since I cannot solve the problem. It is beyond the bounds of my responsibility. I have determined that I will not behave like those monks, and I will teach my disciples not to do so. If this meeting hall is built, it will benefit many people. But I intend to give up constructing buildings. I want to construct people instead. By this I mean that I will encourage people to cultivate good. If people have wrong views and I can teach them to come to the right view, then I will earn much more merit than if I constructed many buildings. In the future, if you become a teacher, please consider this idea."

"Yes, sir. I will follow in your footsteps." The pupil accepted his teacher's suggestion, then said, "Luang Poh, yesterday you told me I would be allowed to ask some questions."

Phra Maha Boon, who had nothing to inquire about, said, "I'll go and practice in my room." He paid his respects to the Abbot and left.

Chapter 18

Luang Poh, sir, Joi told me that you have a magic mirror." This was the first thing Phra Buahyao said when he got a chance to question his teacher.

"Yes? And what else did he tell you?"

"He said that this mirror could predict who our life partner would be, and it helped him become engaged to Miss Juk."

"Is that so? Your mentioning Joi reminds me that his wedding will be performed on 9 December, only a few days from now. Nine monks from our temple have been invited. No evening chanting. We should leave the monastery at 4 a.m. You and Phra Maha Boon have also been invited. It's a full van load," said the Abbot, feeling thankful to Mr. Srist for the van.

"Yes, sir. I would like to know about the magic mirror. Could you please tell me about it? And would you mind if I would like to ask about my future wife?" he entreated humbly.

"Well then, Buahyao, I think you are quite obsessed with this business. Don't you remember that you have to remain single for the rest of your life?"

"I do, sir."

"Then it means you do not believe me."

"I believe you, sir, but I want the mirror review my case. At the time you gave your prediction several months ago, perhaps my future wife had not yet been born."

The Phra Khru wanted to rebuke him, but concluded that he was still a young man, and so could not help thinking in this way. With this in mind, he said, "Well then, I will tell you about it. I learned this knowledge from Luang Poh Suk of Wat Makham Tao, when I had just ordained. Those who can learn this must first attain concentration on the *kasina*, meditation de-

vices for developing concentration of mind. I practiced the water kasina for many months before I went to seek this knowledge from Luang Poh Suk. It is a form of magic. This fortune-telling mirror is accurate in two areas: lost property and spouses. Believe it or not, as you wish. If I left this temple and earned my living from fortune-telling under a tamarind tree at Sanam Luang in Bangkok, I can guarantee you that I would soon be a millionaire, because many people like to hear their fortunes told, especially young female teachers."

"Why don't you do that?" the new monk interrupted. "If I were you, I would have disrobed years ago."

"Yes, I should have done that, I don't know why I didn't," said the Abbot, pretending to agree. "In brief, I learned this from Luang Poh Suk. I attracted big crowds with this ability. First, I had to chant mantras and blow on the mirror—it was an eight-sided mirror, not an ordinary one. Suppose they wanted to know more about their spouse. When I chanted the mantra on to the mirror, the image of their future spouse would appear in it. To erase it, holy water had to be used. If it was not erased, the image would remain there for several days. At that time, Joi was a novice, just fifteen years old. When he saw the image of Juk in the mirror, he was furious, and he accused me of tricking him. See what has happened now? He couldn't escape from Miss Juk." In his mind the Abbot saw the image of that little girl with the running nose, and was amused.

"Is it true that you had to throw out all your food because of her? Weren't you afraid of breaking the discipline?"

"Of course I was, but it was disgusting. I had to tell Joi we were feeding the fish. At that time I was a new monk, and not such a good one, throwing away all that alms-food," he confessed.

"How did you come to improve yourself?" his listener asked.

"I learned insight meditation from the Monk in the Forest and turned over a new leaf. I became conscious of good and bad from my practices. This has been my virtue. Otherwise, I might already have become a devil, working against Buddhism." He laughed quietly before continuing with the story. "One day, Abbot Jun of Wat Ban Nua came to see me for a prediction."

"What for? Was something lost?"

"No, for this spouse business." He stressed the word "spouse."

"Whose spouse?"

"His own. He was sixty-two years old. Sixty-two and he wanted to know about his future wife!"

"What did you do? Did you do what he requested?"

"At first I wanted to refuse because of his age, but he was obsessed with this idea. Oh dear!"

"Could you see anything? Did anyone appear?"

"None. His future wife had not yet been born. I told him that, saying that she was still in hell. He thought I was pulling his leg, but it was the truth. He should not have been angry with me," the Phra Khru said with a smile.

"Is that Abbot still alive?"

"Yes, he is over seventy years old now. I don't know if he is still thinking about his future wife. That monk is just like you," the Abbot said, changing the focus to his disciple.

"No, sir. I am just twenty-six years old, still young and strong. If I were sixty-two, I would forget it," argued Phra Buahyao softly. "Luang Poh, sir. Please help me once, and I won't disturb you again."

"It is too late. Do not waste your time begging me. I have given all that up. Although I sympathize with you, I cannot help you," the Abbot said, refusing politely.

"Why have you stopped?"

"There was a reason. This matter is already over and done with. In fact I do not want to talk about it again. It would sound as if I was criticizing other people."

"If it upsets you, please don't." The new monk felt uneasy.

"It is all right. I will tell you so you will not doubt any more. The story goes like this. A man named Boonchuay asked me to look for something that had been lost."

"What was it?"

"Not something of his. It belonged to a Cambodian to whom he gave sanctuary during the Cambodian war, when a lot of people became refugees. They brought lots of gold with them. The one Boonchuay sheltered had fifty baht (weight) of gold, which suddenly went missing. Boonchuay brought him to me to see if I could find it. When I chanted my mantra on to the magic mirror, which I myself call the fortune-telling mirror, do you know what happened?"

"No, sir."

"The picture of Boonchuay appeared in the mirror. I didn't let him see it, I said, 'Boonchuay, you go home, I won't look at it for you, it will just lead to trouble.' He insisted, however, since he did not believe that the mirror could tell the truth. He thought it would be the same as the case of

Abbot Jun, when no one appeared in the mirror. I refused to look at it for him. In fact I already knew, as his image was still in the mirror. He went and asked Abbot Jun to speak to me, to persuade me to let him see it. I said that if he insisted, all right, and I showed him the mirror. He became enraged, cursed all my ancestors, and called me some terrible names."

"What names, sir?"

"He used really bad words which refer to the private parts of the body," explained the Phra Khru.

"Were you angry, sir?"

"Yes, very. I then made a vow, saying in front of the Abbot that I would not use the mirror again. Then I threw it into the Chao Phraya River, with his image still in it. This is the reason I gave up fortune-telling."

"Is he still alive? I feel like kicking his backside a few times for cursing my teacher," Phra Buahyao said angrily.

"Let us ignore him. I do not hold any grudge against him. It's—"

"—the law of karma," the new monk said, completing the sentence.

"That's right. Later somebody told us that he was imprisoned for many years for stealing Cambodian gold."

"When you were angry, did you mentally note, 'anger'?"

"No, not at that time because I did not know how to. I practiced insight meditation with the Monk in the Forest only after that incident occurred. So, at that time I could not control my anger. If I had been a layman, I might have committed murder. You see the advantage of being ordained? I refuse to disrobe, because I would certainly go to hell if I killed anybody."

"That Boonchuay is a really bad man, sir. The Cambodian took refuge with him to escape from trouble, he shouldn't have done that. He was so black-hearted!"

"Please do not say anything more against him. He has expiated all he did. Karma bears its fruit in time. He called me all those bad names," the Phra Khru laughed. The incident had once hurt his feelings badly but had now become an amusing memory. There was nothing that lasted, nothing that had a substance to cling to.

"What if I begged to learn this fortune-telling skill from Luang Poh Suk?" asked Phra Buahyao. "Would he teach me?"

"I do not know where to find him since he has already died."

"What a pity! I could have learned enough to earn my living at Sanam Luang with this skill. Can I learn it from you?"

"What for? There is no use learning it, because it does not end suffering. I have also made a vow not to teach it to anyone. I am willing only to

teach insight meditation, because it helps us to end suffering. Please believe me. The knowledge of how to make a love potion is not useful either."

"You learned that too?"

"Yes, I learned both white magic and black magic, but I gave it all up. Now I only know insight meditation."

"What made you learn to make love potions?"

"Need you ask? I wanted to be loved."

"Were you loved?"

"You should have counted my tiffin carriers. Young girls competed with each other to bring me food. I could not remember whose was whose."

"Why are there no more now?"

"Well, I refused to leave the monkhood. The tiffin carriers eventually disappeared one by one. Their owners decided to get married to other men. People are so unreliable."

He chuckled after a few moments, and continued, "Some old people here had a plan to make me their son-in-law. There—those homes over there," and he pointed to some houses across the river.

"Sir, what was the plan?" the young monk asked with interest.

"They invited me to their house, hoping that I would court their daughter. I knew what they were up to, so I refused to go, as I did not want to end up married. I had obstacles to overcome, before I could lead a life like this."

"Will you ever quit the monkhood?" the pupil asked.

"Never. I have been a monk for years."

"It is not certain, is it? You are only fifty. Even Abbot Jun, sixty-two years old, thought about it."

"That was him, not me, Abbot Charoen. I will not behave like that. If I had had any intention of leaving, I would have done it years ago, when I was still young."

"They say that when you were young, you were so handsome that you had to take medicine to reduce your attractiveness. Is that true, sir? Joi told me."

"Do you believe him?"

"No, sir, but I would like to hear it from you."

"Why? It is useless."

"I would like to disrobe, sir," the young monk confessed.

"The more you want to disrobe, the less you will be able to do so."

"Then I will not," said Phra Buahyao, falling into the trap.

"That is good," the Abbot concluded. "I pray for you to hold on to that determination. Being a monk is the noblest thing to do. Why would

you want to quit, to create bad karma?"

"Luang Poh, sir, even fellows much less handsome than me have left the monkhood," the young monk argued.

"But there are more handsome fellows who refuse to quit. At least I did," teased his teacher.

"That's you, not me," said the pupil irritably.

"Why do you want to disrobe?" the preceptor asked seriously, when he saw that his pupil was upset. "Believe me, Buahyao. Do not search for a noose around your neck. A married life involves great suffering."

"You have never been married. How do you know it is miserable?" Phra Buahyao challenged him.

"You are not me. How can you be sure I do not know?" the teacher retorted.

"I surrender," said the new monk. "Why should I argue with you?"

"It is not a matter of surrender or defeat. Let us discuss this seriously, Buahyao. Please believe me that married life is great suffering. It is true that I have never been married, but only in my present life. In my previous lives, I have been married many times. As I told you, now you are following the holy path, why should you change your mind?"

The teacher's words made the pupil realize the truth. He did not know why he was caught up in the desire to leave the monkhood when he had set his mind on being a monk for his whole life. Why had he changed his mind? Doubts arose. He asked, "Luang Poh, sir, I don't know why I am immersed in thoughts of disrobing and searching for a spouse. This bothers me greatly. What is causing it, sir?"

"It depends on cause and effect. Don't you know that you are cultivating good? Practicing is the best way of doing good. Whenever one does good, there are always obstacles. One of the obstacles you are facing now is called a 'hindrance'."

"This hindrance obstructs our doing good, is that right?"

"That is right. So you must overcome it to attain the highest good. Your urge to get married is caused by the hindrance of sensual desire. There are five hindrances: sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, anxiety, and doubt. You must overcome these."

"But why do these hindrances attack us only when we practice?" the new monk asked doubtfully. "Where are they when we are not practicing?"

"They are inherent qualities of our mind. Whenever we do good, they will obstruct us. Therefore we have to get rid of them."

"You always say, 'Without obstacles, we cannot cultivate goodness.'

Isn't that so, sir?"

"Yes."

This made Phra Buahyao feel happier, but he still had some doubts. He asked the Abbot, "Luang Poh, do you really have medicine to reduce handsomeness?"

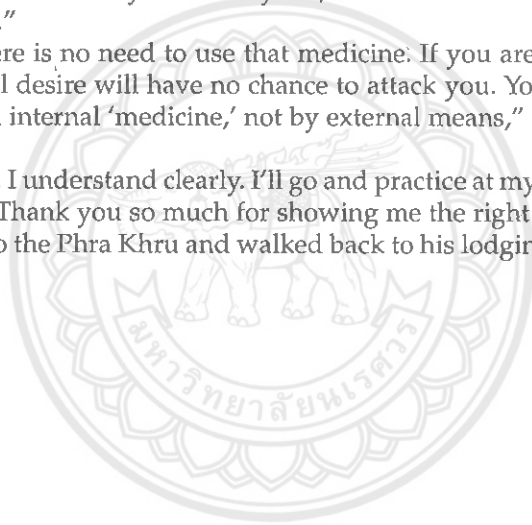
"If I had, what would you want to do with it?"

"I want to take some, sir." At this, the preceptor examined his pupil's face and said, "Your face does not need that medicine."

"That's what Joi said!" the new monk exclaimed. "Luang Poh, why do you say the same thing?" Then he added, "I don't mean it that way. I know that I was born ugly, but I want to be uglier with the help of your medicine, so that nobody will marry me, and sensual desire won't attack me any more."

"But there is no need to use that medicine. If you are mindful at all times, sensual desire will have no chance to attack you. You should overcome it by an internal 'medicine,' not by external means," the teacher advised.

"Yes, sir. I understand clearly. I'll go and practice at my lodging. I will overcome it. Thank you so much for showing me the right way." He paid his respects to the Phra Khru and walked back to his lodging with a joyful heart.



Chapter 19

Late in the morning of 8 December 1973, the Phra Khru was interviewing Mrs. Thongrin about her meditation practice, while Somchai sat nearby, awaiting the Abbot's orders.

Whenever the Abbot had to interview a woman privately, he usually insisted on having a third person present. It was well known among his close disciples that the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was very strict about the monastic rules, particularly where they concerned the opposite sex.

Many young monks who in the beginning were determined to ordain and strive for liberation, but lacked certainty about how to conduct themselves with women, had to disrobe in the end, and become the husbands of those women.

This problem arose even in the Buddha's time, as in the case of Phra Ananda Thera, whom a nun named Vasika planned to disrobe, since she was head over heels in love with him. It was only his awareness, coupled with his pure mind, that saved him from being ensnared by her. He was even able to teach her, until at last she realized what was right and what was wrong.

"How are you, Upasika? Were 'rising' and 'falling' very clear?" he asked the forty-year-old woman who had come from Bangkok to practice. She intended to stay for one week at the monastery, but the Phra Khru told her to stay for two weeks, since "perceiving" told him that she had bad luck. Within fifteen days, if she practiced only in the monastery, she would be safe from harm, but if she ever left the monastery grounds during that time, she would certainly be killed. That's why he forbade her from going anywhere.

"Sometimes they were clear, but sometimes they were not, sir," she answered. Phra Buahyao had come for an interview, but seeing that the

Abbot had a guest, he was about to withdraw when the Phra Khru stopped him.

"Do you have something to talk about, Buahyao? Please come in first." So the young monk had to enter and sit in a suitable place. He paid his respects to his preceptor. Mrs. Thongrin prostrated to the new monk three times.

"I am interviewing her. It is better if you sit and observe, since you will be an insight teacher in the future. You should know how to interview your pupils."

"Yes, sir," the new monk willingly accepted. Somchai went off to do his work upstairs.

"Luang Poh, my practice has been very bad the last three days."

"Why? Do you miss your family?"

"No, sir, but I felt very drowsy and I want to sleep. It happened even when I was doing walking meditation."

"Then you were sitting sleepily, with saliva dripping from your mouth, weren't you?" asked the Abbot, since he knew the cause of those symptoms.

"Yes, sir. You say that as if you had seen it," the woman said shyly.

"I have both seen it and been like that myself. This problem is due to your mind being attacked by nivarana or hindrances. It is called the hindrance of sloth and torpor. That is why you feel sleepy all the time."

"And how can we get rid of it, sir?" asked Phra Buahyao, since he was also attacked by this hindrance.

"The ways to get rid of it are: to eat less than usual, and to alter your position very frequently, such as standing, then walking, then sitting in rotation, and to stay in the open air. The most essential thing is to make the effort, and to be determined to succeed."

"Cultivating good is very difficult, Luang Poh. I feel discouraged," she said sincerely.

"Do not be discouraged. You are having bad luck now. If you lose heart, you will surely have difficulties. You must practice intensely to overcome suffering," he encouraged her.

At that moment, a middle-aged woman crept in, paid her respects to the Abbot and said, "Do you remember me, Venerable Brother?"

"Who could forget the master cook named Boonrup? How are you? You have not been here for a long time, have you?" the Phra Khru chided her. Mrs. Boonrup was the cook at the monastery many years before. Later, she had moved to Phichit Province, and had vanished until now.

"I wish I could come here every day, but I can't, since it is very far, and the journey is quite difficult. I miss you all the time," she said, glancing at the white-clad woman who was sitting silently in front of the Abbot's seat. Seeing the woman's face clearly, she felt immediate hatred, for it resembled the face of her first husband's new wife. She had divorced her first husband and married again.

As a matter of fact, since each of them had remarried, there was no real reason why she should hate Mrs. Thongrin just because of that resemblance. But she did. Why? Mrs. Boonrup could not find the cause, but she gave her a look of displeasure.

Seeing that, the Phra Khru felt sorry for Mrs. Thongrin, since she had so many enemies in her previous life. "Do you have anything more to ask?" he gently asked her. "If not, you can go and practice at your lodging. Tomorrow morning I will not be here, since I have to chant at my nephew's wedding ceremony. If you have any problems while practicing, you can question me in the afternoon. Do not forget that you must not go outside the monastery grounds. Now then, you can go." The middle-aged woman prostrated to the Abbot three times and left. Mrs. Boonrup gave her a look of disdain.

"Very bad," she said venomously, though she did not understand why.

"Why scorn her? She did you no harm," the Phra Khru pointed out.

"I hate her. Look, her manner of walking is so ugly, twisting her buttocks like that," said the older woman.

"Please stand up and walk outside. Walk in that direction," the Abbot commanded. Mrs. Boonrup did so. She had walked about four or five meters when the Phra Khru called her back. She returned and sat in her place.

"My dear Boonrup, do you realize that when you walk your own buttocks twist, in a much uglier way than hers, yet you dare to criticize her," the Abbot said, trying to teach Mrs. Boonrup indirectly, but she failed to understand.

"How I walk is not your affair," retorted the cook.

"And how she walks is not yours. So why did you criticize her?"

"I hate her."

She dared not say that her hatred was caused by the woman's face, but the Abbot understood the reason clearly and said, "I know why you dislike her. It is because her face looks like the face of the woman who married your former husband. Isn't that right?"

At this, Mrs. Boonrup sat speechless. After a moment she said quietly, "That's right, sir. How do you know everything? You really are an outspo-

ken fellow."

"*Upasika*, please speak politely to the monk. It's wrong to talk like that," warned Phra Buahyao sincerely. Mrs. Boonrup immediately felt hatred for the new monk, too.

"Pay no attention to her, Buahyao. This person always speaks badly. It is her karma to be like this."

"But I think such behavior can be cured. It's better than leaving it to karma," the pupil said, as he had been taught by his teacher. He didn't know that his words planted the seed of hatred firmly in Mrs. Boonrup's mind.

"How did you come, and why? You haven't told me that. You haven't stopped criticizing this person and that person since you arrived. Your behavior never changes," the Phra Khru said frankly, but Mrs. Boonrup remained calm. In the days when she had stayed here and helped with the cooking, she was always quarreling with others, since she was very proud of herself for being an expert cook, and looked down on others. Many of her friends said behind her back, "She stays in the monastery, but she never tries to abstain from evil."

"I want to stay here for a week to help with the cooking, because I miss you so much," she said, trying to please the Abbot.

"Good. Then I will let you share a room with that woman. Perhaps you will learn to love her," teased the Abbot.

"No, no," exclaimed Mrs. Boonrup, "I don't want to stay with someone I hate."

"Then you should stay with a person you love. Come and stay at my lodging," said the Phra Khru sarcastically. He knew well that she had been in love with him.

"That would be wonderful, sir." Instead of being embarrassed, she accepted willingly.

The Abbot was full of pity for her, because she made no effort to reduce her defilements. He said, "If you have evil thoughts, you will surely go to hell. Then you will trouble me, since both of your husbands will come and blame me." As soon as he heard Mrs. Boonrup's words, Phra Buahyao had begun to dislike her. He did not realize that ill-will was attacking his mind.

"Then where will you let me stay, sir?" she asked.

"Choose for yourself. You can stay in whichever room is empty. The crematorium is also empty."

"Don't make fun of me, Venerable Brother. Boonrup won't die before

her enemies." By this she meant Mrs. Thongrin and Phra Buahyao.

"You say that as if you can decide the day of your death. My experience is that people who speak that way are usually the ones to die first."

"You scorn me, Venerable Brother. It is very bad luck for me to be cursed by you," she grumbled.

A short, fat, bald-headed man around sixty years of age crept in and said to the Phra Khru with joined palms, "Luang Poh, please give me some asthma medicine. My daughter is very sick with asthma."

"I don't have such medicine, but I shall tell you how to make it yourself." The Abbot then explained how to prepare asthma medicine from herbs.

"I'll go to find lodgings, Venerable Brother," said Mrs. Boonrup, and prostrated to the Abbot three times. As she was leaving, she remarked, "What is happening today? Why is the sun rising over the garlic jar?"

"Who are you talking about?" the man demanded angrily. Mrs. Boonrup said nothing, but walked out quickly.

"Who is that woman, Luang Poh? With such a foul mouth, I'll make her teeth fall out. Maybe she doesn't know who I am," the man said angrily.

"Pay no attention to her. Please go and prepare medicine for your daughter. Do not fight in the monastery, I beg you." The man hurriedly prostrated three times and left, thinking that if he saw the woman outside the Abbot's quarters, he would scold her severely for daring to mock his appearance.

"Do you have any questions to ask?" the Phra Khru asked the young monk when everyone had left.

"Yes, sir. I would like to ask one question: I feel that everything I eat tastes very good, even the water I drink."

"That means that you are clinging to taste. *Kamachanda nivarana*, the hindrance of sensual desire, is attacking you."

"Is that good or bad, sir?" the monk asked awkwardly.

"Not good. It is all right for lay people, but if monks and practitioners cling to sensual pleasures, their meditation practice cannot progress. It is not good in this respect."

"And how can we overcome it, sir?"

"Contemplate before eating, as the Buddha taught. 'This body is arisen from food. Eat only to live, do not cling to it.' This means that whenever a monk eats, he should contemplate the fact that he is not eating for fine complexion, for grace of the body, or for flavor, but only to sustain his life, to overcome painful feelings caused by hunger, and to follow the holy life."

"In short, we must use 'wise consideration' in eating, is that right, sir?" questioned the new monk.

"Yes, wise consideration is very important for getting rid of hindrances. Without wise consideration, you cannot overcome the five hindrances. Now then, if you practice more and more, you will understand this well," the preceptor advised, having previously had the same experience.

"Luang Poh, how can a person who stays in the monastery still commit evil? Take Mrs. Boonrup, for example. You said that she stayed here for many years, yet she has not cultivated goodness or reduced her defilements. She should be a good person."

"Some monks stay here but cannot abstain from evil, even though they have been ordained most of their lives, for forty of fifty years. So why not Mrs. Boonrup?"

"Why are you gossiping about me?" interjected Mrs. Boonrup, who was passing by and heard this exchange.

"It is good that you have come. Have you found accommodation? Does it please you?" the Phra Khru asked.

"Yes, sir. I came here to inform you about that, my dear Venerable Brother."

"Stop! Stop!" said the Abbot, "don't talk like that. It is not good."

"But I love to talk like that. I came to tell you that I got the room opposite to that woman's. I'd love to annoy her, and I will," Boonrup said fiercely.

"Please, Mrs. Boonrup, please. Do not trouble her. She has come here to gain merit. Making trouble for her would be bad karma. It is good that you have come, since I am going to instruct you. Listen carefully," said the Abbot. He then instructed her.

"You have bad character, Boonrup. You have practiced vipassana meditation, but why haven't you improved?"

"How am I bad? I came here to help with the cooking, so why do you criticize me in this way?" asked the woman angrily.

"Stop talking and sit down. It is rude to stand up when talking to monks." The woman sat down, unwillingly. The Phra Khru continued his teaching.

"As for your intention to help with the cooking, I thank you. But why do you behave like this? How can you cultivate goodness if you do not abstain from evil first?"

Hearing this, Boonrup felt annoyed, since she did not like being taught. She lied, "Yes, sir, I'll try to change my ways," then she left.

The Phra Khru shook his head and said, "She doesn't accept good

father had not overcome his intoxication, and was afraid to face the Abbot.

The cooks were busy preparing food for the monks. The Abbot closed his eyes and noted, "perceiving," since he wanted to know what the cooks in the kitchen were talking about.

"Why are you tasting so much? Eating before the monks will make you a hungry ghost," one of the cooks scolded a friend who was tasting the soup.

"It's very tasty," answered the other cook.

"Yes, those who talk like that are reborn as hungry ghosts. I have seen many of them."

"How can you see that?" the cook retorted.

"This has been taught in my family for generations. Though I haven't witnessed it myself, I believe what I have been taught by my elders."

A third cook spoke up for her friend. "That was true in your ancestors' time, when monks were worthy of respect. Then, if we had eaten before them we would have been making bad karma, but not nowadays. Monks these days are not fit to be called monks. We can only call them, 'those who shave their heads and wear the saffron robe.' They are experts in begging. They want to eat only good food, and they beg for money."

The Phra Khru opened his eyes. He couldn't bear hearing any more. These country people looked down on monks, though they should have respected them. Whose fault was this? He felt very upset.

Seeing that Joi was talking to Phra Buahyao at the end of the row, he mentally noted "perceiving," to hear what they were talking about.

"Why didn't you invite monks from nearby? Aren't you afraid that they will be angry?" asked Phra Buahyao. It was a tradition to invite nearby monks when one wanted to make merit at home.

"As I told you before, I don't have faith in those monks. You see, the law of karma has performed its duty. The Abbot is dead." He deliberately used the Thai word for "dead" instead of the more respectful Pali word "marana."

"What did he die of?"

"He was struck with an ax, and he fell dead near the Uposatha Hall. Now he is surely in hell."

"And what about Luang Ta Thong, the drunken monk?"

"Oh, you have a good memory. He disrobed before the death of the Abbot. Maybe he was afraid of going to hell because he could not give up drinking. He might have thought that his drinking would be less sinful if he were a layman."

The Phra Khru concluded to himself, "So, it is like that. No wonder those cooks have no faith in monks. 'Just someone who shaves his head and wears the saffron robe'—that is how they referred to monks. Their words were like a mirror, reflecting their concept of 'monkhood'," he thought.

The sound of a motorcycle came below the window. Shortly afterward, Juk walked upstairs. She paid her respects to Venerable Phra Khru, as well as to the eight monks. She was dressed in a Thai costume of a soft pink color. Her hair was bound at her crown in a topknot style, and her face was made up with cosmetics. She looked very pretty on her wedding day.

"Have you been here long, sir?" she asked the Phra Khru.

"I arrived just before you," replied the Abbot. It was just on 7 a.m., and the ceremony began. The nine monks chanted together to bless the audience while the bride and groom sat listening, with joined palms placed over the square pink pillows.

When the monks had finished their chanting, the lay leader of the local congregation told everyone to repeat after him the Pali words of offering food to monks. Following that, the monks ate their morning meal.

Having finished eating, the nine monks blessed the donors. The bride and bridegroom poured the water of dedication, to transfer their merit to other beings. All the cooks came from the kitchen to be blessed. The Abbot recognized the woman who had criticized monks, and he teased her, "Those who just shave their heads and wear the saffron robe are very bad, aren't they, Upasika?" The woman was very surprised, for she had never thought that her gossip would be heard by this monk. Fortunately, he wasn't angry.

"Which monastery do you come from, sir?" she inquired, her faith roused.

"Wat Ambhavan, have you ever heard of it?"

"Never, sir. Where is it?"

"Not far from here. If you want to come, you can ask the bridegroom to take you. They teach vipassana meditation there. Do you want to learn?"

"Yes, sir. But, Luang Poh, aren't you angry with me?" She was still worried.

"Why should I be angry?"

"Because I criticized you."

"Why should I get angry? I am not the kind of monk you were talking about. But even if I were, I should not get angry, because that would mean that you were telling the truth. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir. But how do you know what I said?"

"You will know when you come to practice. I will tell you at that time."

anything like that. Since she went to the monastery, I haven't been drunk, and I am determined not to drink for the rest of my life. Maybe she transmitted her merit to me so that I could give up drinking," Mr. La-ong said with tears in his eyes.

"That is good. I approve of you. Upasika Thongrin will be happy to know that. As for her body, she wanted it to be cremated here. She said that she wished to continue her practice before being born again."

"Can a spirit practice, sir?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"Why not? For example, the spirit of Mae Kalong has been practicing here since she died. She was a hungry ghost, but now she has become a deity. She is very pretty and she appears here sometimes. Many people see her from time to time. She also used to teach vipassana meditation to Upasika Kheaw, the oldest nun in this monastery, who is now eighty years old."

"Did Upasika Kheaw know that Mae Kalong was not a human being?"

"She did. But she isn't afraid of spirits. She practiced walking meditation with Mae Kalong. The other nuns dared not do that. Buahyao, since you know the story of Mae Kalong, do not tell this to the four rich men," the Phra Khru ordered the new monk. "They will not come here again if you do."

"No, sir, I won't."

"And my wife, sir, why didn't she have a long life?" asked Mr. La-ong.

"According to the teachings of the Buddha, someone who enjoys killing will die young. Upasika Thongrin enjoyed killing in her previous life. Those who were killed by her got their revenge in this life. She was killed by them. She herself told me this."

"But if she hadn't left the monastery, she would not have been killed, is that right, sir?"

"Yes, her enemies were waiting for her on the Asia Highway. When she crossed the road, they blinded her to the truck."

"It's incredible that spirits or ghosts actually exist. If it wasn't said by you, I wouldn't believe it."

"Though I said it, you have the right to disbelieve it until you can prove it for yourself."

"How can I prove it, sir?" he asked attentively.

"By practicing vipassana meditation for one week. Do you have time to come here?"

"I will try, sir. I'll wait until my children have a holiday."

"That's good. Upasika Thongrin will be pleased, and you will be able to talk to her yourself."

"Venerable Luang Poh, can I come with Papa? I want to talk to Mummy," the fourteen-year-old girl asked.

"Yes, you can if you practice attentively. And you, will you come here?" the Abbot asked the girl's younger sister.

"If my father and sister come, I will come too," the twelve-year-old replied.

"Luang Poh, when will the body be cremated?"

"After three nights of chanting. She is not interested in her body now. Without consciousness, the body is like a log of wood."

"If that is so, shall we cremate it today?" Phra Buahyao asked—a very good idea in the Abbot's opinion.

"We cannot do that, Buahyao. Do not forget that she has relatives. We must let them know first. Then they will arrange the funeral ceremony according to their tradition. You see, there are still many people who misunderstand birth and death."

"In that case, I will go back to Bangkok to inform them," said Mr. La-ong.

"Do not do that. You are grieving now. It is very dangerous for you to drive in that condition. It is better to telephone them. I will tell Somchai to drive you to town to telephone. Another reason is that you should stay here to arrange the bathing rites, which will be performed at 5 p.m. I hope that her relatives can arrive in time. Now you and your daughters must take a rest. Can you stay in the same lodging as your wife? Are you afraid?" asked the Abbot.

"No, sir," Mr. La-ong and his daughters answered.

"Well, Somchai, take them to the lodging, then drive the father to town to telephone," he instructed the lay attendant. When the father and two daughters had gone, Mrs. Boonrup arrived, weeping.

"Luang Phi, I am afraid of the ghost."

"That is right, because you hate her. I hope you are haunted by her ghost," the Phra Khru said, taunting her.

"I don't hate her any more. When I saw her dead body, I pitied her," she confessed.

"But if she were alive, you would still hate her, wouldn't you?" the Abbot retorted.

"I don't know about that. But now I truly pity her. Please go to the blissful state, Thongrin. Don't take revenge on me."

and was just heading off when the Phra Khru waved his hands, beckoning him:

"Wait a minute, young man, let's have a chat first." The young man jammed his foot on the brakes, and poked his head out of the window.

"What's up?"

He didn't show any of the traditional signs of respect, but the Phra Khru understood the Muslim tradition of not showing respect to any person or object other than the Highest God, Allah. "Where have you come from? Why have you brought all these dogs and let them go in this monastery?" he asked, smiling.

"I come from Jawai. Ma told me to bring them and let them go in the monastery because they attack the goats. We haven't raised these dogs, they just came, so Ma had me come and let them go. I'm a Muslim, Muslims don't raise dogs, sir," the young man explained. Ma is the word Thai Muslims use to refer to their mother.

"Oh, and why have you come so far? Between here and Jawai there must be hundreds of monasteries. Why come all the way here and waste fuel?"

"Ma told me to come here. She said to bring them to Wat Ambhavan, then they won't be harmed. Ma said the owner of this monastery is kind, the dogs will be happier here than at other monasteries. Even though Ma hates them, she doesn't want to see them harmed."

"Oh, so that's how it is. In that case you can go back and tell your mother that the Luang Poh of this monastery said you can go and bring in as many truckloads as you want, I guarantee they will be safe." He had intended to be sarcastic but the young man was oblivious. He answered, "Yes, sir, I'll tell Ma what you said," and then sped off without saying good-bye.

The Phra Khru watched as the car sped off, shaking his head slowly from side to side. What is it with this monastery? Cats come, dogs come, a continuous stream. The day before someone had come and brought in a sack full of kittens on a motor cycle and let them go. The monastery was beginning to seem like a zoo.

Somchai, who was carrying the tiffins behind the Phra Khru, had just caught up with him in the yard. "Have they brought in another load of dogs, Luang Poh? Why do they have to let them go here? There are stacks of other monasteries, why don't they let them go there?" the young man complained.

"They say the dogs wouldn't be harmed here," said the Phra Khru,

quoting "they."

"Why wouldn't they be harmed? Old Boonrup hits them every day. My ears are going numb from the sound. When is she going to leave, that's what I'd like to know?" he muttered.

When they arrived at the *kuti*, the Phra Khru put his bowl down and went to wash his hands and wipe them until they were thoroughly clean, before beginning the morning meal prepared by his attendants. Having finished the meal, he rinsed his mouth and brushed his teeth, which meant that he was "finished with eating for the day." Then he took his regular seat. He knew that Phra Buahyao was going to come for an interview.

"Luang Poh, I'm in a real mess," his student reported as soon as he had finished bowing. Even though he knew what the matter was, the Phra Khru had to ask him about it, if only for politeness. "Why are you in a mess? Tell me about it."

"I hate old Boonrup so much I can't practice. My mind has fallen so low I can't lift it up. What should I do, Luang Poh?"

"There, that's the hindrance of aversion taking over your mind. Why don't you use intelligent reflection (*yoniso-manasikara*) to get rid of it? Why do you leave it run away with you?" The student didn't answer, as he didn't know what to say, so the teacher explained further.

"To give up the hindrance of aversion you must use *yoniso manasikara* in the release of loving kindness, as the Buddha said: 'Monks, there is a release, the application of keen reflection in which deprives sustenance for the arising of any aversion that has not yet arisen or for the growth of any aversion arisen already.' The way to practice it is to attend to a sign of loving kindness and to maintain that attention, meditation on loving kindness, consistently, by reflecting that all beings have their own karma." Looking at his student he could see that he still didn't understand, so he asked him, "Must I explain it in detail?"

"That would be good, because I only know the principle, I'm not very clear as to the details."

"In that case listen well. The development of meditation on loving kindness or the spreading of thoughts of goodwill must always begin with yourself."

"Why must you begin with yourself? I don't hate myself, I hate someone else. Shouldn't I spread thoughts of goodwill to them?" Phra Buahyao contested.

The Phra Khru explained: "The reason the Buddha taught to spread thoughts of goodwill to yourself is because it establishes you as a witness,

thus: I love happiness and hate suffering. I want to live and don't want to die. It is the same with other people or beings."

"What if we actually want to die and don't want to live?" Phra Buahyao was beginning to tease him. The Phra Khru had to keep him in line:

"Now then, don't go asking irrelevant questions and throwing the conversation off track. You really like to go off the beaten track."

"Yes, sir, I won't go off. Please continue your teaching, I won't interrupt."

Since his student had invited him, the teacher continued to give his teaching: "Normally, all people and all sentient beings love themselves, as the Buddha said: 'No matter how far a person may search in all directions, he will find none he loves more than himself. In the same way, their own selves are what other people love most. For that reason, one who loves himself should not harm others.' This is why you must direct thoughts of goodwill to yourself first. Do you spread thoughts of goodwill to yourself? Let me hear the words for reciting the formula."

"Do you want it in Pali or in Thai, sir?"

"In both languages."

"In that case I'll start with the Pali and do the Thai afterwards. Ahem!"

The young monk cleared his throat, and began reciting in a loud voice, "*Aham sukhito homi, niddukkho homi, avero homi, abyapajjho homi, anigho homi, sukhi attanam pariharami*: May I be happy, may I be free from danger, may I not be harmed by others, may I have no bodily or mental suffering, may I protect my own happiness."

"Very good, you remember fluently. Now then, when you have spread thoughts of loving kindness to yourself, as the first person, you begin to spread those thoughts to others, beginning with those you love most, then proceeding to those you only like, to those you are indifferent to, until finally you can do it with your enemies. But if while you are generating thoughts of goodwill to your enemies a thought of aversion arises, you must practice according to one or more of the nine methods for dealing with anger laid down by the Buddha."

"What if you use all nine methods and the anger doesn't subside?"

"That shows that that person has such thick defilements and craving that he is unteachable. We cut off his tail and let him go in the monastery. Such people are like the lotuses that stay in the mud, the *padaparama*."

"And how do you cut the tails of those who don't have them? Me, for example, I was born without a tail," said Buahyao, who couldn't resist the temptation to tease.

"Buahyao, you seem to have a particular talent for diversion. How can I teach you so that you really remember, so that it really stays in your mind?" upbraided the Phra Khru.

"If you want to teach someone so it really hurts you should teach ... cut someone with a razor blade and then pour tincture on it. I guarantee it will hurt and sting at the same time," recommended the young monk. His happiness lay in teasing his preceptor. He wanted to make him angry because he had never seen his teacher angry. They say that an Arahant has no anger—or is the Phra Khru an Arahant?

"In that case I'll go and continue my writing upstairs, I won't bother telling you the methods recommended by the Buddha for dealing with anger, I'll just leave you to hate Boonrup and let you be burned by the fire of hatred until you are completely baked!" He berated his student at length, but his student knew his teacher was not angry because his expression was not severe, and his voice was not harsh like Boonrup's.

"Gosh Luang Poh, I was only joking, and you get hurt over it. Please continue your explanation, I won't tease you any more."

"You're sure? In that case, listen well. The first method for getting rid of anger is to reflect on the harm of anger. Anger has many harmful effects and no beneficial ones. If another person is angry at us and we respond to their anger with anger, we are said to be worse than they are. A person who answers others' anger with non-anger is said to have attained a victory hard to come by. So if you get angry at Boonrup, that means you are worse than Boonrup.

"If you try this method and it doesn't work, the second method is to think of that person's good points. Most people have some goodness and some badness in them, so we can think of that person's good points and not think about the bad points. If you can't find anything at all about that person that is good, then have pity on them, thinking, 'Dear! Such a pitiful person will surely meet with dire circumstances of many kinds, because his behavior is bad. Hell may be in store for him.' Thinking in this way you should be able to get rid of the anger, but if not you must try the third method: reflecting on the truth that being angry will just make suffering for yourself. There is no such thing as an angry person who is happy. Thinking in this way our anger should disappear, because who would want to sit and make themselves suffer?"

"That's true, sir. What if the anger still doesn't go away, what should we do then?"

"Then we try the fourth method: to reflect that all beings fare accord-

ing to their karma. Karma built on anger will only lead to regression for you. Both we and other beings have their own karma, karma is our birthplace, karma is our heritage, karma is our refuge. Whatever karma we do, we must receive the results thereof. And the karma that arises from anger will not lead to liberation, it will not lead to either divine or worldly treasures. It will only pull us down to burn in the hell realms. Bearing this in mind, one should not allow anger to take hold in the mind, but if after this kind of reflection, the anger still doesn't subside, you must try the fifth method, which is to reflect on the conduct of the Buddha. Before the Buddha became enlightened he built up the parami, perfections, over many lifetimes, even giving up his own life. When he was attacked and exploited by others he did not respond with anger but with kindness. Even if others came as foes or assassins, the Buddha did not hold it against them. These stories appear in the Jataka tales, such as the story of Mahasilava and Mahakapi. You can read them for yourself. In fact you should try to read them to broaden your knowledge rather than just opening your mouth to eat," he said, knowing that his student was really attached to food.

"Yes, sir, I will take a copy and read it. What is the sixth method, Luang Poh?"

"The sixth method is to reflect on the fact that we have probably had relationships with all beings throughout the infinite history of Samsara, as the Buddha said: 'Monks, it is not easy to find a being who has not previously been our mother, our father, our older or younger brother, our older or younger sister, our son or daughter.' This means that all people who are born in this world must have had some connection at some time in a previous life. Take Boonrup for instance, she may have been your mother, or your older or younger sister in a previous life, that's why you have met again. So you shouldn't be averse to her."

"But what if she is averse to me?"

"That's her business. If you do not hold on to enmity in your mind, the enmity will disappear on your part. As for her, if she's angry she will suffer, while you, not being angry, will not."

"Is that what they mean by 'the sound of one hand clapping'?"

"Er, I'm not so sure about that, because I've never clapped with one hand. I haven't clapped my hands since the day I ordained, either one or both," said the Phra Khru, beginning to feel a little playful.

"That's good, you've done the right thing. If you are a monk and you clap your hands your virtue will be despoiled," answered the Vietnamese monk.

"Now then, now then, that's enough. It's not good to speak frivolously. Let's talk about the seventh way of getting rid of anger, which is to reflect on the benefits of loving kindness.

"Just as anger has harm and leads to deleterious results, goodwill (*metta*) has benefit and leads to good results. In that case you should let go of anger and establish your mind in goodwill. Goodwill will get rid of your anger and not allow it arise again. A person whose mind is imbued with goodwill is able to win over the minds of others, and that is a conclusive victory, it won't lead to defeat. One who is established in goodwill helps both himself and others.

"The Buddha described eleven benefits of practicing loving kindness: one has sound sleep, one wakens fresh, one has no bad dreams, one is loved by other people, one is loved by non-human beings, one is protected by the devas, one is protected from burning by fire, or harm by poisons or weapons, one's mind is easily concentrated, one's complexion is clear, one dies with clarity, and the last benefit is that if one has not attained to one of the higher attainments, one will be reborn in the Brahma world at the lowest."

"And if one still doesn't lose one's anger?"

"Then you must try the eighth method, which is to analyze the elements. This is reflecting on the level of ultimate reality, it is hard to understand. I won't explain it to you right now, you must practice to a higher level first, then I will explain it. If I explain it now you won't understand.

"Now then, I will go on to the last method, which is to reflect on the giving of gifts that are *samvibhaga*. To give gifts that are *samvibhaga* is to give something to your enemy and to receive something from him. However, if your enemy's gift is not pure, then just give your gift, don't take his. If you do this, that person's hatred will be removed. Giving is a method of getting rid of anger which leads to immediate results. It can instantly dissolve enmity that has been nursed for a long time. It is a practical manifestation of goodwill (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*). The Buddha said of the great power of giving: 'Giving is a tool for training one who is not yet trained. Giving leads to success in all undertakings. The giver is radiant in his giving, the receiver comes to greet him with friendly words.' This is the last method for getting rid of anger. You see now, don't you, how profoundly and detailed our Great Father gave his teachings. Do you want to listen to a story about one of the Buddha's disciples who never held an unkind thought for others? Do you want to hear it, I'll tell you about it?" he asked his listener.

"Do you want to tell the story, Luang Poh? If you want to tell it, I want

to listen to it," said the listener cheekily.

"What if I don't want to tell you about it?" retorted the Phra Khru.

"Even if you don't want to tell the story I want to listen to it. So Luang Poh, please tell the story. Please," he said, putting his palms together in the formal gesture of invitation. So the Phra Khru began:

"The story goes that at one time the Buddha was staying in the Jetavana Monastery. A disciple of his named Punna went to see him and asked for a teaching. The Buddha taught him not to delight in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily feelings and mental states that are desirable, delightful, enticing. When delight ceases, suffering will cease.

"Venerable Punna said that he was going to stay in a country called Sunaparanta. The Buddha said, 'The people of Sunaparanta are violent. If they abuse you what will you do?' Punna answered that he would still consider it better than if they had actually hit him. Then the Buddha asked what would he do if the people hit him. Punna answered that he would consider himself fortunate that the people didn't use sticks to beat him. The Buddha asked what if they use sticks? Punna answered that he would consider himself fortunate that they did not use weapons. The Buddha said, what if they use weapons? Punna answered that he would consider himself fortunate that they did not kill him with the weapons. The Buddha said, but what if they kill you? Punna answered that some people have to go in search of someone to kill them, but here I do not have to search, someone has done the job for free.'

"The Buddha acknowledged his answer and allowed Venerable Punna to go to the country of Sunaparanta. When Punna went there, he taught the Dhamma to the people of Sunaparanta and many of them mended their ways and became followers. And within that Rains Retreat he himself attained the Three Knowledges and enlightenment."

When the Phra Khru finished his story, his student said firmly, "I'll remember the story of this disciple as a lesson to myself. I will try to do as he did."

"That's good. I offer my blessings and believe that you can really do it."

There was silence for a moment, then Phra Buahyao asked, "Luang Poh, can we also spread thoughts of goodwill to animals?"

"Of course we can, why not? Not only animals, but even to plants. Some people have already tested this out and they achieved results that exceeded their expectations. Look at Boonrup, for instance. If she changed from swearing abuse to spreading goodwill she wouldn't have to argue

with the dogs and cats. She says they shit all over the place so she swears at them and hits them. Dogs and cats have minds. She does that and they get angry, so they go and shit all over her place! Not only that, they go and tell their friends to do the same. If Boonrup spread thoughts of loving kindness, they would stop doing it—and tell their friends to stop too.”

“If they stopped shitting they would die, Luang Poh.”

“No they wouldn’t. I meant they would stop shitting all over the place and would do it more discreetly, they wouldn’t mess up the kitchen like they do now,” the Phra Khru answered patiently, even though he knew his student was only trying to tease him.

“In that case you should teach her to practice loving kindness meditation, then I wouldn’t have to listen to the sound of her swearing.”

“Why wouldn’t I teach her? I’ve taught her so much I don’t know what else to teach her, but she doesn’t receive it. Her name means ‘receiver of merit’ but she doesn’t want to receive any. I put her in the group of people who are ‘going against the current.’ Some people are hard to teach, Buahyao. Just because they come to this monastery doesn’t mean that they are all easy to teach.”

“It must be due to their karma, right?”

“Both the karma they have made and the karma they are making. If the karma they have already made is not good, it is still possible to rectify the situation with the karma they are making now, but she refuses to do it. People like this seem to be getting more and more by the day.”

“They must be left to fare according to their karma, is that right?”

“Something like that. All right, now it’s time for you to go back and practice. I will go upstairs and do some more writing. Don’t forget to spread thoughts of loving kindness to Boonrup,” he warned.

“I won’t forget. Listening to Luang Poh’s teaching, my anger has half gone away already. I’m sure that I can get rid of this hindrance. I would like to bow and give my highest thanks to you, Luang Poh, for showing me the way to light. I take my leave now.” The young monk prostrated three times, got up and left the kuti.

Chapter 22

It was late afternoon before the last visitor had left. The Phra Khru was going up to his room to do some writing when Somchai led a monk into the lodging. The newcomer pay obeisance three times. The Phra Khru acknowledged it and said in greeting,

"Ah, it's you, Abbot, what brings you here?"

"I came over by ferry. I have an urgent matter to consult with you, sir." The speaker looked worried and his face was pale, lacking the dignity which usually adorned one who lived in the monkhood.

Somchai poured tea and served the two monks, then got up and left. The Abbot didn't seem to want him to hear his 'urgent matter.'

"What's weighing on your heart? You don't look at all happy."

"It's a most vital matter, sir," replied the Abbot from the temple on the opposite side of the river, as he brought two thick wads of money from his satchel and placed them in front of the resident monk. The money was intended to ensure the success of his business. The Phra Khru, feeling that things were getting a little out of hand, protested,

"My dear Abbot, why are you taking out so much money? I think you'd better put it back in the satchel. It won't look good if someone sees it."

"I offer it to you. Twenty thousand baht, my life savings. I want to give it to you if you succeed in helping me. Frankly, it hurts me to part with it."

He was trying to impress upon the listener the largeness of the sum, but the Phra Khru replied flatly, "If you feel ill parting with it, then just keep it. I guarantee that I will help you all I can without any reward. Even if I never have as much money as this, I have no wish for it. You may not believe me when I say this, but it is the truth. Personally, I do not amass

money. Whenever someone presents it to me I give it all to the temple. There are always bills for water, electricity and food for those who have come to practice meditation."

"I think your way is wrong. Nowadays everybody uses money. As for me, money is very important. When something goes wrong, it can help ease the situation. Believe me, Venerable Phra Khru, without money, small matters can turn big and simple solutions are difficult."

"But I think the opposite. I believe that a monk lives a life of solitude; amassing money and gold is a layman's affair."

"You can have your life of solitude. I can't be like you because I do not like to be so careless with my affairs."

The Phra Khru would have liked to reply that, on the contrary, it was the behavior of the Abbot that was truly careless, in that he was intoxicated by the material offerings given to him by people out of respect for the religion. But he refrained from doing so because he realized that saying such things to one with wrong view, especially a monk, would serve no purpose. He was reminded of the saying, "The conviction of a monk, the pride of a teacher," which should be observed in such instances.

"You say you have something to consult with me, have you not?" The Phra Khru changed the subject.

"Yes, sir, I beg you to help me. You are the only person who can help me. Think of it as a good deed, sir."

"Since I do not know for what matter I can be of help, pray enlighten me."

Then the Abbot, who was of the same age as the Phra Khru, began, "The villagers want to disrobe me because they say I have committed a grave offense."

"And are you as they say?"

"No ... er ... no sir," was the hesitant reply.

"Oh ... then since you are not what they say, why worry? Er ... how did the story come about? Why did they make such an accusation?"

The Abbot was quick to agree, "That's right! Why do they make such accusations against me? There is no truth in it." The last sentence was a soft whine.

"Eh ... but there's a proverb—'there's no chicken without an egg.' You'd better not lie to me. Tell me straight out what happened. If I can help, I will. Just tell the truth."

The Phra Khru's words forced him to come out with the story, but not completely.

"They say I committed adultery. You see, a girl came to see me on some private business. She usually comes with her mother, but that day her mother was sick and couldn't come, so she had to come alone."

"And then?" the Phra Khru inquired, seeing the "problem" take shape. The speaker's innocence was becoming more and more dubious.

"She came to consult me without her mother."

"At which place?" The Phra Khru began to interrogate him like a lawyer.

"At my lodging."

"Was there any third party there?"

"No."

"What time did she come?"

"About 8 p.m."

"And how long did it take to finish the 'consultation'?"

"About ten p.m. ... which I think was not very late," he said, hoping to put the situation in a better light.

"And at the time of 'consultation' was the light turned on or off?"

"It was on sir, but it was a little dim, so it was kind of dark."

"And what then?"

"I did not know that some villagers were watching and one of them went to tell the headman. The headman ordered men to surround the lodging."

"When did you realize that?"

"When they shouted in to me ... the woman was so frightened she jumped into my lap."

"Oh, when they shouted in to you, why didn't you jump out the window and run away? You stayed to let them catch you on the spot ... and then who would believe you?"

"I was thinking of that ... but the woman held onto me very tightly." He used the word 'hold,' but the truth was she was embracing him tightly because they had reached a critical moment.

"And then what next?"

"They invaded my lodging and saw it."

"Saw what?"

"Saw the girl sitting on my lap and holding me tightly. They charged me with having sexual intercourse, and now they want to disrobe me."

Unsure whether or not the story the Abbot told was the whole truth, the Phra Khru checked it out with his heightened perception, and what he saw saddened him. To think that a monk in saffron robe could do such an

outrageous act!

"And how I can be of help?" He asked the question, though there was no way he could see to help him.

Looking a little happier, the accused monk replied, "I beg of you ... please speak on my behalf not to let them disrobe me. Don't let them remove me from the position of Abbot."

The Phra Khru could stand no more. He interrupted,

"Don't just think of saving your own skin, Abbot. Try putting yourself in their place. If you were the villagers, and you saw a monk behave like this, what would you think? Would you still have faith and respect for him? Frankly I would like to reprove you because you have hurt the villagers and destroyed their faith. Are you aware that you have defiled the religion? I feel very sad, very sad indeed."

The listener lowered his face in humiliation, but pride spurred him on. "Don't give up," he thought to himself, "You are the Abbot, you can't give up."

Fired by this thought, the Abbot continued recklessly, "So you think I am guilty?"

"Only you who know if you are really wrong or not. I would like to ask you something. Of the 227 precepts, how many are left? Since you have begged me for advice, I would like to advise you on this occasion to leave the monkhood. Leave it and be an ordinary householder and let the matter rest. If you resolve to stay, it will only taint the religion further. You cannot hold onto the position of Abbot, since the villagers do not want you to."

"So you really won't help me. I know you could if you wanted to. It's been a waste of time being a friend with you for so long," said the other, taking him to task.

"Oh, since you have known me long enough, you should be able to read my mind. Do not let me make another mistake. Do you realize that I am very disappointed to see you behave so wrongly in seeing evil as virtue? It's not pretty at all."

"Reproach me as you like, I don't mind. Only help me. I decided to come and ask your help because I know you are a merciful person. Won't you have mercy on me?" the Abbot pressed.

"Mercy has its limits, Abbot. If you give mercy to people wrongly, it will only hasten them toward hell. Will you believe me this once? Retire from the monkhood. Do not let the matter lay unsettled like this."

"How can I retire? Just think, I am fifty years old. What can I do for a living? I am accustomed to receiving. If I retire, who will give me money

and food? The girl is only seventeen. She can't work because she's still at school. More important than that, obtaining the position of Abbot is not easy, you know."

"Since you are so reluctant to give up the position, then why didn't you look after your position securely? What's the use of regretting when nothing can be done? The more you speak the sadder I feel, since it clearly shows that you entered the monkhood to obtain a living. I thought you wanted to turn away from evil but in truth you saw monkhood as a means of livelihood."

"Say what you will, that's my business. Are you going to help me or not? This is a large sum, twenty thousand baht!" he said as he pointed to the two stacks of money in front of him, trying to soften the Phra Khru's stance.

But his host said firmly, "You, Abbot, might like to speak slightly of yourself, but I cannot be bought. I will not bow to money, but I will bow to the cause of righteousness. Keep your money, I do not want it." The Phra Khru was displeased with the other monk's actions, but when he reflected that all worldly beings fare according to karma, the feeling of displeasure changed into mercy and pity.

He said to the visitor:

"Reverend Abbot, do you remember the Buddha's words about karma? He said that all people, women, men, householders and monks, must reflect on the truth that 'I am the owner of my karma, the heir of my karma, born of my karma, related to my karma and supported by my karma. Whatever action I do, whether it be good or evil, of that I shall be the heir.' Have you ever read that? If I am not mistaken, it is in the Tipitaka, Volume 14."

"Yes, sir. I remember it."

"Good. You go back and consider the matter according to what the Buddha says. Maybe you will feel better. Think of it as your karma. You are its creator, so you alone will reap the fruits. Nobody can escape karma. Consider Venerable Moggallana, one of the Buddha's chief disciples—he had psychic powers and could fly through the air, but was killed by bandits because of the karma he had created with his parents in a previous life. If you believe me, Abbot, pray do as I advise you."

"How can I believe you? If I do, I lose. And you know who I am. I am the Abbot. How can I lose out to those villagers?" the guest said defiantly.

The Phra Khru was getting fed up, but kept cool enough to continue, "Have you forgotten that a monk must learn to be a loser? A monk must always be the loser. If not, why would they say that 'Losing is saintly, win-

ning demonic'?"

"But I don't believe in old sayings. I believe in the saying that says to believe in the old sayings only makes matters worse. So I do not believe it, and I won't give up."

Seeing that the Phra Khru was not going to help, the Abbot no longer saw any necessity in restraining his anger. He went on loudly, "Good then, just you remember that there is always a tomorrow. And I will wait and see whether you yourself do not get in the same spot as I have."

"I guarantee it. I guard myself with mindfulness at all times. There is no way that such an event could occur with me. I am very careful about this sort of thing. And I have trained the other monks in the temple to be the same, so you needn't worry."

"That's all very well, but someday you will make a mistake. I see it too often in temples with nuns. One day a nun gets pregnant"

"But it won't be a monk from Wat Ambhavan. True, my temple has nuns, but I have arranged for the nuns' quarters to be completely separate from the monks'. And I have forbidden the monks from entering the nuns' quarters. Whoever disobeys has to leave for another temple. What's more, I have followed the rule just like everybody else, I have no special privilege. I'm not going to make a mess of things like you."

These words made the Abbot of the other temple feel as if he were sitting on hot coals. He knew he was at fault, but he didn't like it being said so bluntly.

While he sat thinking of something really bad to say, the Abbot felt a stir in his heart. The fire of anger was cooling through the power of the Phra Khru's compassion, which re-installed in him his sense of right and wrong. The old Abbot spoke softly:

"I am sorry. If I were not so careless, I would not have made such a mistake. I confess that I have committed this wrongdoing, some devil made me see evil in place of goodness." He could not help putting the blame for his transgression on something else.

"Don't blame any devil for your fault, blame yourself—it is because you lost your mindfulness that this has occurred."

"Maybe you're right. I'll agree to disrobe. This money might come in handy building my future," he said, putting the money back in his satchel. At a loss for words, he sat still with bowed head.

"Stop thinking about this business. Better start thinking about how to earn a living. Your accumulated virtue has brought you only so far, when it's time to 'die,' you must 'die,'" he said, referring to the change from celi-

bacy to lay life.

"But I am sad ... sad and sorry that I could not maintain the celibate life. I would rather be a monk than a layman. When I disrobe, I will have to move away. I couldn't stand seeing the people who used to honor me ridiculing me. This is the greatest loss in my whole life." His voice trembled and the Phra Khru, seeing tears in a man his own age, felt for him. But he could do no more to help. It was a matter of karma, for which each person must accept responsibility, good or bad, sweet or bitter.

"And where do you think you will go? Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"None, my parents, brothers and sisters are all dead. There's only my nephew and some relatives whom I have not seen for a long time. I don't even remember them, and if they do remember me, they would not like to associate with a person who has committed a grave offense like me." This time the Abbot burst out in sobs, feeling utterly bereft of honor and dignity. The Phra Khru felt sad beyond words. Both were silent for some time, then the visitor spoke up:

"I think I'd better leave. Thank you for giving me back my senses. I have just realized this instant that you are truly compassionate. If you had helped me in the wrong way, it would just hasten my path to hell. I beg your forgiveness for being angry with you. I must go now."

When he had finished speaking he knelt down and paid obeisance to the Phra Khru three times. The Phra Khru acknowledged him, saying with sympathy,

"I wish you luck. Anything I can do to be of help, just let me know. Do not hesitate. I will be glad to help you in everything that is not morally wrong. Remember that."

"Yes, sir. I will think of you first. I must go."

"And how will you go back?" he asked with concern.

"The ferry is waiting sir. I hired the boat."

"Then I will accompany you to the pier."

"Don't trouble yourself, please. This matter has taken too much of your time as it is. I see that you are very busy," the visitor said meekly.

"That's all right Since I have made up my mind to accompany you, another five or ten minutes won't be any trouble." Then he accompanied the visitor to the landing behind the temple. Before stepping down to the boat, the Abbot turned back to thank him, and said, "Thank you so much, I feel better now. What you said is true: no matter what we do, be it good or bad, we must reap the result of our karma."

"I didn't say it—the Buddha said it," the Phra Khru hastened to correct him.

"Yes, that's right. If you hadn't spoken those words I would still be blind. Now I have seen the light, my mind is clear. I will accept the results of my karma in full. You are a monk who does good. May you prosper in the Dhamma ever more, and reach the highest virtue within this life. I wish for your happiness." So saying, he put up his hands in a gesture of respect. The Phra Khru also joined his palms in answer and waited as the little ferry pulled away from the river bank.

The sunlight had faded, for it was late afternoon. The shadows of the monk and the oarsman could be seen clearly, stretching out across the water, but the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was shocked to see that the shadow of the Abbot from across the water had no head! He knew then that the Abbot's life was over, and hurried back to help by spreading loving kindness. At least it may help to ensure that his spirit's sojourn in the nether worlds would not be too long. It was the least he could do.

After getting out of the ferry, the Abbot had to walk two kilometers further before reaching his monastery. The sun was sinking slowly. Both sides of the path were thick with dense foliage, which made it unusually dark. He quickened his pace, wanting to reach his lodging before the snakes came out looking for food. He had gotten to within ten paces of the forest's edge when he heard gunshots nearby. He felt a flash of pain in his chest, and immediately lost consciousness. His last thought was of the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan.

The news of the Abbot's murder spread through the village. Soon everyone in the hamlet and the district had heard about it. But apart from the Phra Khru, no-one knew who the killer was. Only the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan knew that it was the jealous lover of the young girl with whom the Abbot had had his liaison. His jealousy had turned to hatred and a lust for vengeance, and he had avenged the Abbot's misdeeds with his death.

But the deeper cause was the way of karma. In his previous life, the Abbot had killed that lover, so in this very life, he himself was killed, even as a monk. Since, however, he had committed evil karma, his good karma from being a monk was exhausted, leaving the way open for bad karma to ripen. Now the Abbot had paid his dues.

Chapter 23

The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was eating his morning meal on the lower level of his lodging. He had intended to go upstairs to write after the meal, but as it turned out he had to change his mind when he saw a couple coming towards him carrying a brass tray between them. In the tray was a cream colored stone, oval like an egg but about ten times the size.

When they were within alms length, they put down the tray and paid respect to the teacher three times. The man asked,

"Luang Poh, are you Venerable Phra Khru Charoen?"

In answer, the Phra Khru asked them, "You have some business with me?"

"Yes, sir. My name is Montri, my wife is Sumalee. Our home is in Chong Kae but we teach at Ta Kli."

"Oh, so you are teachers. Where have you just come from? Have you eaten?"

"We are not hungry," Sumalee replied.

"No, that cannot be. When it's time to eat you must eat. Somchai," he turned to his attendant, "would you please take the guests to have breakfast?"

The two teachers obediently got up and followed Somchai into the temple's kitchen area, and returned to the lodging after a short while. The Phra Khru had brushed his teeth and rinsed his mouth, and was sitting waiting for them.

"Are you bringing this stone to offer to me or do you want me to 'invest it with auspicious power'?" he asked, smiling. People these days had all kinds of strange beliefs. Some monks even made a living out of making "lucky" phallic symbols which they sold to gullible people as aus-

picious objects. Perhaps this couple was of that type, he thought.

"We are bringing it to offer to you, sir. Please take it, Luang Poh. This stone has a very strange history. If I told you about it you probably wouldn't believe me," Montri said apologetically.

"Try me out. I'll tell you when I hear the story whether I believe it or not."

Then Montri the teacher began to relate the following story:

"The guardian of one of the students gave it to one of my friends, who is a teacher at Amphur Lam Plai Mas in Burirum province. The story goes that a couple who has a farm at the Tambol went into the forest to build a hut. The wife had collected some stones to build a fire place. They had finished preparing the rice and were about to light the fire when one stone cried out, 'I'm burning, I'm burning! What are you doing to me? If you burn me I will break your necks!' The couple took the stone out and replaced it with another. The next day, when they tried to use the same stone again, the same thing happened. So they placed it in front of a shrine, and at night the stone entered their dreams, telling them it wanted to practice insight meditation at Wat Ambhavan, and begged the couple to take it there. But they couldn't because they didn't know where the monastery was. The next night it entered into their dreams again and told them it wanted to practice insight meditation with Phra Khru Charoen. The third night it came again and told them where the monastery was. The couple told this story to my friend, and begged him to help them, because they had no money for the trip. Naturally my friend did not believe the story, but he took pity on the couple, for they looked most troubled.

"The first night the stone was in my friend's house, the same thing happened as before. Still my friend did not believe the couple's story. He thought that his dream was sparked off by the couple's story. But the next night the stone came into his dream again. This time he began to wonder, but still he would not believe it. The third night the stone told him there would be a friend from Ta Kli, and that he should take the stone to his friend, and if not it would break the necks of everyone in the family. This time my friend was rather worried, though he still wasn't convinced. He didn't know which friend was going to visit him. He didn't have any friends from Ta Kli, that is, he knew that I lived in Chong Kae. And then at the time I was visiting a relative who was a district officer at Lam Plai Mas, so I went to visit him. When he saw me, he was very surprised and asked where I came from. When I told him that I came from Ta Kli, his face turned pale and he told me the whole story. He begged me to take the stone with me.

This is the story, sir."

While Montri, the teacher, was telling the story, the Phra Khru sat silently. When the speaker had finished, he began interrogating him:

"For how many nights has this stone been with you?"

"Only one, sir. I arrived yesterday night and brought it here this morning."

"And last night did anyone enter your dreams?"

"No, sir. Nothing happened."

"And do you believe the story?"

"I'm not convinced, but if someone came into my dream like it did with my friend, I would be. And what about you, Luang Poh, do you believe it?"

Before answering the question, the Phra Khru used his perceiving to check the story.

"I believe it. So much as I have heard it, I believe your story to be true because I believe in spirits." He tried to explain it in such a way as to avoid sounding like he was boasting of any superhuman attainments.

"I believe this stone is the same age as the ones they brought to build Phanom Rung Temple. And I believe it has a spirit inside."

"Is it the spirit of a man or a woman, Luang Poh?" Sumalee asked, looking askance at the stone.

"I believe it to be a man, one of those who helped build Phanom Rung temple. A stone fell on him and killed him. Then his spirit was trapped inside the stone and could go nowhere."

"But my friend told me the couple found it in the forest," Montri interjected.

"In that case, someone stole it from the Stone Palace, maybe a tourist who thought it curious, but since he was cursed by the spirit, he left it in the forest until the couple found it there."

"And why does he want to stay at this temple, sir?"

"Er ... this I don't know. If you would like to know, I could ask him for you." The Phra Khru turned half in jest to "the man who came with the stone," who was crouching in front of him. The two teachers could see none, but even so, they were afraid, and quickly replied in unison,

"No, no, it's not necessary."

"Oh! I can communicate with him, I tell you," the owner of the lodge said, smiling. He then turned to speak to the man kneeling in front of him, though to the two teachers it looked like he was talking to a stone.

"Please have a pleasant stay. You can stay here at my lodging. You can

help welcome any visitors who may come, and I will teach you how to meditate."

Then he slowly nodded his head, saying "Oh, uh-hum," as if he was listening to the stone talking. The two teachers looked at each other, thinking, "Luang Poh is slightly out of his mind."

The Phra Khru hastened to correct them, "I am not out of my mind. I am really talking to him. If you don't believe me, you can bring a doctor to check if I am crazy." The Phra Khru's statement surprised the listeners somewhat, and Montri said to himself, 'Oh, this Luang Poh has psychic powers.'

"He asked me to thank you and said later he will go to your home and give you some lottery numbers."

This time Sumalee's eyes sparkled at the thought of imminent riches.

"Then I have taken him to the right temple, haven't I?" Montri asked, all his doubts resolved.

"That's right. He is very happy. It is indeed praiseworthy: even though he's dead, he still wants to practice virtue, while those who are still alive treat life carelessly and fill their lives with delusion," he said, thinking of the Abbot from across the river.

However, Montri assumed that the Phra Khru was talking about him, and hastened to excuse himself, "Sir, from now on I will stop going out unnecessarily and drinking."

He had just realized at that moment how badly he had been to his wife and children. "Amen, may you keep your word. I ask Luang Poh to bear witness to his oath." Sumalee put both her hands to her forehead in a 'wai.'

"All right, I will be your witness. Oh! And I would like to ask you one more thing, about your smoking. I want you to stop because it's harmful and serves no purpose."

"Yes, sir, I promise to stop," the young teacher said with great faith.

"Good. After you have given up vices, the next thing is to be strict in moral conduct. Both of you should observe the moral precepts. The five precepts are enough. Once you have established your morality, you can practice meditation, and then your life will prosper."

"Wouldn't it be better to take one step at a time, Luang Poh? If we take on too much I'm afraid I won't be able to keep it up," Montri bargained.

"Certainly you can't take it all if you do not make an effort. Practicing virtue requires effort. Without effort, you can't do it. You are lucky you have such a good wife. If not, she would have left you long ago. I hope you don't mind me speaking so frankly." He said, sensing that the man in front

of him was "one who could be taught."

"I don't mind, sir. How can I be angry with one who intends me well? It is a great fortune that I have come to know you, Luang Poh. I am stubborn by nature. I never obeyed my parents, but it's strange that I believe you, Luang Poh. Up until today I never respected monks much."

"Why not?"

"They destroyed my faith in them. Please excuse me, Luang Poh, do you know Luang Ta Orn?" The monk's name was one that everyone knew. His reputation was not good.

"I know him. How could I not know him, he is so famous?"

"That's right. I almost stopped respecting monks because of this Luang Ta Orn. I don't want to speak about it, you will chide me for criticizing monks."

Even if Montri did not say it, the Phra Khru already knew. He could find out whatever he wanted as long as it was not beyond his clairvoyant powers. He knew that Montri had a falling out with Luang Ta Orn because the latter had borrowed money from him and not returned it. It was rather a large sum and, more importantly, it was not Montri's own money, but borrowed from his mother.

"But now my faith in monks is restored. At least I know that there are good monks in this world. If I had not met you, this feeling would not have occurred," Montri said fervently.

"It is good that you see it that way because people who do not respect monks are already halfway to ruin."

"How can it be wrong, Lung Poh?" Sumalee inquired.

"It is wrong in that the mind is tainted," he replied.

Sumalee nodded her head in understanding.

"I would like to bless you once more for regaining your respect for monks. This is just like making merit. In fact your parents were good people, very good. Why didn't you obey them? Am I right?" he asked, turning to Sumalee.

"It's true, Luang Poh. His parents are so good. It was on account of their virtue that I decided to marry him," Sumalee said, taking the opportunity to goad her husband.

"That's ended now. From now on he will be a good man. You can bury the hatchet," the monk said, seeing the husband staring hard at his wife, and countering to himself, "Well why didn't she marry my parents?"

"I think we must be going now. We will come and pay our respects to you again soon," said the man. He was getting irritated with his wife.

"Bless you. And don't quarrel with each other. Whenever you two stop quarreling, you will be rich," he said, leaving them with a warning, since he knew that they liked to quarrel a lot.

"Yes, I have stopped quarreling with him already," Sumalee answered—she wanted to be rich.

"Oh, and don't drive so fast. You drive like a teenager," he warned again. Montri was surprised once again. How did this monk know everything about him? His surprise only increased his faith in the monk.

"It's true. You tell him. I tell him, but he won't listen. It's getting worse all the time," Sumalee said, taking the opportunity to report her husband's untoward behavior.

"Luang Poh, I am fed up with people who always complain about others. I don't know where to dump her," the husband said irascibly.

"Well you shouldn't give her so much to complain about—and don't dump her, keep her safe. If you get rid of her, you will be the one to suffer. I'm talking according to the facts, not just taking sides."

Unable to win the argument, he began mumbling to himself, "I won't suffer, Luang Poh. When I dump this one I can find another, and I guarantee that she will be slimmer and more beautiful. I can really do it," he glanced at the plump woman sitting next to him.

"Sure you can do it, but the quality is different. Old things are more valuable, like antiques. As things get older, they become more valuable."

"But people aren't like antiques, Luang Poh, especially women. The longer you live with them the older they get, and the older they get the more talkative they are. That's why men brand women as a sex that grows old quickly but dies slowly."

"Yes, especially a woman who is your major wife, right?" The Phra Khru seemed to know everything, so Montri thought it better to stop talking. To argue further would only make him look worse. Seeing that Montri had stopped arguing, the Phra Khru concluded,

"Now then, don't go looking for a new woman to tire yourself with. One is good enough. Do you think a new woman would love your children? Believe me. And stop quarreling with each other. Whenever you stop quarreling you will be rich. My advice has made many couples rich already," he said knowingly. He knew that for ordinary people wealth always comes first, then Dhamma.

"Yes, I will definitely stop quarreling with him," Sumalee replied hastily. When it came wanting to become rich, she was first.

"We must take our leave, sir," the couple said, bowing three times.

When the car reached the main road, the driver slowed down so much a turtle would have walked faster. His wife said, "What's wrong with the car?"

"Nothing. Since you don't like me driving fast, I'll drive slowly." His reply was clearly meant to tease her, but she stopped asking. She was thinking of Luang Poh's words—whenever they stopped arguing, they would be rich.

Seeing his wife didn't continue the argument, Montri began to feel annoyed with himself. He increased speed, but not as fast as before, keeping in mind the Phra Khru's warning.

On observance days the Phra Khru did not receive invitations to go out since a lot of people would come to the temple for different purposes. Some came to give offerings of food or other requisites. Some came to discuss Dhamma. Others came to seek advice in their businesses, and others came to consult about life's problems, especially family problems. The last group were slightly neurotic. Phra Buahyao dubbed them 'people who dumped their problems on monks.' And even though the work had made him so busy that the Phra Khru could hardly find time to himself, he was always kind to them. He listened to all their stories and problems, and even helped solve them as best as he was able.

People who received his advice and followed it found that he could solve their problems. Those who were not suited to this practice turned to monks of other temples, who sprinkled holy water, made potent charms, and distributed amulets, for help. The troubled people spent a lot of money to no avail, since they didn't solve their problems at the cause. As the Phra Khru had said so often, "Solving problems in the wrong place is like eating a mangosteen without touching its seed."

"Luang Poh, can a monk listen to worldly problems?" Phra Buahyao asked critically.

"Why not? They are also Dhamma. The word Dhamma, besides meaning the teaching of the Lord Buddha, also means nature. The Lord Buddha taught about nature, nothing else."

"And what is nature? That is, I want to know its deeper meaning."

"Nature is all things that arise because of causes or conditions and degenerate because of causes or conditions. When there is a cause or condition for its arising, it arises, and when there is a cause or condition for its decline, it declines. Therefore everything in this world is nature, because everything is born from conditions. Buddhism does not believe that things can occur without cause or condition."

"Then karma is nature, isn't it?"

"Right. That is why those who don't believe in karma or the fruits of karma will be punished by nature. As you have probably seen, the ways of the world and the ways of Dhamma are not in opposition to each other. If we want others to turn toward Dhamma, we must help them solve their worldly problems. If their minds are confused, they cannot understand Dhamma.

"During the Buddha's time, when He was teaching his followers, He helped them solve their worldly problems first. Thus it is not out of character at all for a monk to help solve the problems of householders. But he must solve them correctly and he must himself be above the problem. He should not get so involved in their problems that he is defiled by them."

"That means he can help, but he must do so with mindfulness, is that right?"

"Right. Being mindful is very important. Practicing to have awareness at all times is of paramount importance. The Lord Buddha said that mindfulness and clear comprehension are two qualities which are of immense help in the practice."

"But to practice mindfulness is very difficult, Luang Poh. The more I practice, the harder it gets. I have practiced for three months now and I don't seem to have made much progress."

"That's just what it seems like. In truth you are progressing, I can tell."

Hearing the Phra Khru's words, Phra Buahyao felt encouraged. Still he couldn't help giving vent to his feelings. "It looks like however hard I try to practice the defilements keep on increasing. It seems they aren't going to disappear easily."

"That's why I tell you that you've progressed. People who do not practice do not know they have defilements. Defilements can be both coarse and refined. Those which are more refined are more difficult to get rid of. The coarser defilements are those of bodily actions and speech. They must be cleansed with moral conduct. But more refined defilements need mind training and wisdom. When wisdom is born, you can get rid of the refined defilements of the mind. And to allow the birth of wisdom, you must have a calm mind. The development of mindfulness is for the calming of the mind in meditation. The practice has to incorporate all three things—morality, concentration and wisdom. This is called the Three Trainings."

"Refined defilements are really hard to get rid of."

"Have you ever sifted flour? In sifting flour, however hard you sift, there's still some chaff left no matter how refined the sieve is and no matter

how many times you sift, because the chaff gets more refined with each sifting. The training of the mind is similar. However refined our practice is, the defilements get more refined in proportion. To get rid of defilements completely is difficult and requires an extraordinary effort. But no matter how difficult it may be, it's not beyond the ability of a man who has perseverance. If not, no-one in this world would attain Nibbana, right?"

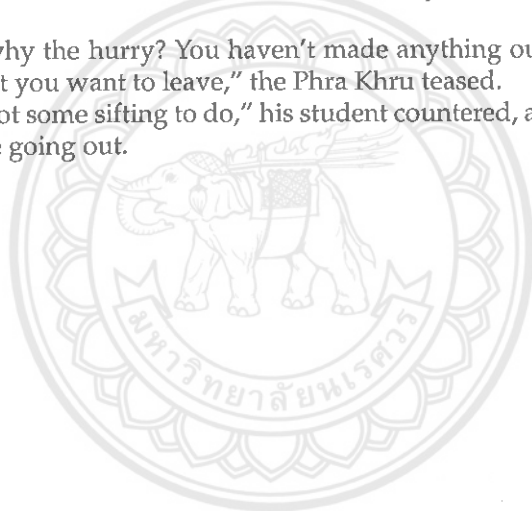
"True, and Wat Ambhavan has an Arahant already," Phra Buahyao said, testing his teacher's attainments.

"Don't talk such nonsense. It's not right. And moreover, it is not pronounced or-ra-hun but a-ra-hun. Remember, next time don't pronounce it wrongly and become an object of criticism for those who know."

"Yes, sir. In that case I would like to take my leave to go to my lodging."

"Oh, why the hurry? You haven't made anything out of our discussion, and yet you want to leave," the Phra Khru teased.

"I've got some sifting to do," his student countered, and bowed three times before going out.



Chapter 24

This observance day was like most others: when the Phra Khru came down from his lodging upstairs, he found many people waiting, even at four o'clock in the morning. Each face was hardened with the problems of life for which they came to him to lighten the burden.

Somchai, who slept on the lower floor of the lodging, had to get up very early to receive the guests each morning. More importantly, he had to remember who came first so as not to let people get out of line. Some of the guests, wanting to meet him first, had been sitting in the open, dew drops falling on them, since before the lodging was opened, enduring mosquitoes and cold weather.

Somchai was an exceptionally fair steward, he would receive no gifts or bribery. Whoever came first would be first to meet the Abbot. The Phra Khru had impressed upon him the importance of being fair in arranging who was to be meet him. Regardless of whether they were dignitaries or ordinary people, good, bad, rich or poor, whoever arrived first would see him first.

The Phra Khru excused himself to go and perform the formal *uposatha* ceremony, which would take about two hours, with the other monks. During this time he would also lead the monks and novices in meditation practice and dedicating their merits to all "departed beings," or, as some would say, "ghosts."

Some of these ghosts would wander around the temple, waiting to receive merits from those who offered them. Some came from faraway lands, on the recommendation of their ghost friends. The Phra Khru once told Phra Buahyao that these ghosts were just like people. When people go to eat somewhere and find a particularly delicious restaurant, they tell their friends or relatives to go and try it out. These ghosts were the same. When

they knew that at a certain temple there were many people who came to make merit, and there were monks who meditated and dedicated the merits to ghosts, they would flock to the temple to receive them, and also tell their ghost friends or relatives.

The reason these spirits had to wander around begging for merits from human beings was because they had at first not believed in merits, bad karma or karmic retribution. When they were living they made no merit, and when they died, they had become "hungry ghosts," forced to live on merits given to them by others. Whenever no-one came to make merits, these departed beings would suffer intense hunger. Still, they were better off than the hell beings who, in addition to starving, were punished in different ways according to their karma.

When he had finished helping the ghosts, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan would walk back to his lodging to help people. Phra Buahyao followed him to observe the proceedings as usual. It was the Phra Khru's wish that he did so, as he wanted to let the new monk learn from direct experience.

Once the Phra Khru had taken his regular seat, Somchai motioned for an old man aged about sixty to move toward him so as not to speak over other people's heads. The man crawled within reaching distance, paid obeisance three times, and sat silently.

"What have you come to see me about? Speak up," said the Phra Khru.

"Yes, sir, Luang Poh. I have been sitting waiting since 2 o'clock this morning, outside the lodging. My name is Boonchuay." His report was like an announcement that he had not pushed in on anybody.

"Is that so? Now then, what do you want me to help you with? Come out with it." If it was not a secret matter, the Phra Khru would speak in a normal tone. If it was something the "plaintiff" did not want others to hear, the Phra Khru would speak very softly so that only the two could hear.

"It's my mother, Luang Poh."

"What about your mother?" he asked, when the old man spoke no further.

"She's a woman, she's my father's wife," said Boonchuay artlessly, but everybody who sat in the room thought he was intentionally taking up too much time.

"Oh, you've waited since two in the morning to tell me this?"

"There's more, sir, there's more," Boonchuay hurried to say in case he lost his place in the queue. "You see, my mother's afraid of dying, Luang Poh."

"How old?"

"Me? I'm fifty-five."

"No, not you, your mother."

"My mother is eighty-five. Would Luang Poh please help her? She doesn't want to die. She urged me to come and beg you for a magic spell. She said you have a magic spell against death," reported the loyal son.

"Ah, that's all. I wondered what the problem was. This is not a difficult matter at all, it's very easy. I'll tell you the magic spell."

Everyone sitting in the lodging leaned forward expectantly, waiting to hear.

"Go back and tell your mother that there are two things in this magic spell against death. The first one is to keep breathing, the second one is to keep eating. If she can do these two things, I guarantee she will not die. Everybody dies because they stop breathing and stop eating."

The Phra Khru's answer brought laughter from everybody except Boonchuay. He quickly paid obeisance and prepared to leave.

"Thank you so much, Luang Poh, I must go now."

"Why the hurry?"

"I have to quickly go and tell my mother. She will be overjoyed to hear of the magic spell."

"Wait a minute, I haven't told you the secret yet. There's more. Listen: you must not be afraid of death. You must confront it bravely. People who are afraid of death are dying all the time."

"If you are not afraid of death, then you won't die, is that it, Luang Poh?"

"Whether you are afraid of death or not, you still have to die just the same. But from what I have observed, those who are afraid die quicker. So don't be afraid of death, be only mindfully aware that life is impermanent. Things are born, continue for a while and then die according to causes and conditions. When we are mindfully aware at all times, we tend to do good, speak well and think well. If you can do all this, you will not be afraid of death because you will be assured of not being born in a woeful existence. People are afraid of death because they're afraid of going to a bad place, such as the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms or the animal realms. Can you understand what I've said?"

"Yes, sir," Boonchuay answered.

"What do you understand? Tell me what you will tell your mother." The Phra Khru wanted to test his listener's grasp of what he had said, because many were those who caught hold of the "wrong end of the stick." They would distort what he had said and claim he had made the most

outrageous statements. That is why the monk liked to check his listeners' understanding.

"I understand that one should breathe and eat, then he won't die. As for the secret, it is not to be afraid of death. If you are afraid, you die; if not, you don't. This is what you want me to tell my mother." The old man answered according to his grasp—this was all his "receiver" could pick up.

"Oh, I said that, did I? Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure."

"Then I will bring Phra Buahyao to witness. Buahyao, did I say what this man says I said?"

"No, sir, you said this," and Phra Buahyao proceeded to explain what the Phra Khru had said until the man understood.

Then the Phra Khru allowed the man to go home. The next in line was a woman of fifty.

"Luang Poh, I want to die," was the first thing she said.

"You want to die, do you? Then just follow that man."

"Why?" she asked, puzzled.

"Why, then you could meet his mother and change places. His mother doesn't want to die, but you do. You should change places, then both sides would be satisfied."

"Hmmp! If it were possible, that's all very good," the woman said.

"It is good, that's why I suggested it. Luang Poh Charoen never suggests anything bad," he said jokingly, hoping to lighten the troubled hearts around him.

"But I want to die without having to change places with someone else," the woman persisted.

"You're sure you want to die?" he asked seriously.

"Yes, I'm sure," she replied softly.

"Then die if you want to. This temple has everything you need: a crematorium, monks to do the requiem chanting. Never mind if we don't have charcoal, Somchai can go get some at the market. But what type of coffin would you like? Pine wood or champac wood?"

Seeing the monk get serious, the woman felt dismayed and wanted to change her mind, but she was ashamed in front of the others. So she continued the pretense.

"It's up to you, sir. Any kind of wood will do."

"No, that cannot be, I'm not the one who's going to die!"

"Then make it champac wood," the woman said even more softly. She began to perspire at the thought of dying.

"All right, then. Somchai! Come here please. Would you go and invite ten monks for requiem chanting? Then go and order five sacks of charcoal at the market." He glanced at the woman and said, "A thin body like this shouldn't take more than five sacks at the most."

At last the troubled woman seemed to relent. She said softly, "Luang Poh, I'm afraid it might be very hot if you burn me with charcoal."

"But if you are dead we must burn you. We can't let the body rot away in the temple, the smell will be terrible."

"Then in that case, never mind, I don't want to die," the woman said, taking the opportunity to change her mind.

"Be sure, now. Do you want to die or not? I can arrange things as you please. If you keep changing your mind I won't know what to do."

Thinking he was making fun of her, the woman began to cry, saying, "Luang Poh, I am worried. I want to die, but I don't." She cried and cried. Everyone felt sorry for her. Other people's stories all seemed so pitiful, one forgot that one's own story was just as pitiful.

"Take hold of yourself, stop crying. Then tell me what you are upset about. If you keep crying like that, how can I know?"

His words made her stop. Wiping the tears with the back of her hand, then onto her skirt, she proceeded to tell her tale of woe. It seemed that her husband had been discretely having sex with a maid in the house. When she dismissed the maid, her husband left home to go and live with her and wouldn't come home.

"Luang Poh, why do men like to mess with the servants?" a thirty year old woman asked. She had the same problem. Seeing the similarity in their problems, the Phra Khru used his heightened perception to see how many of the people before him were having the same problem, so that he could deal with them all and save time. He perceived that there were six more cases of husbands taking mistresses, four of the six being with servants. All eight cases could be dealt with in the same manner.

"You haven't told me why men like to mess with maids," the thirty year old woman asked.

"This is one question I do not know how to answer, having never become involved with maids." His answer brought laughter from everyone, including the woman who asked the question.

"But, Luang Poh, you should be able to answer because you are a man," the woman persisted.

"Let me answer that one," volunteered one of the four wives whose husbands had maids as mistresses. Her voice was full of malice and resent-

ment. "Because these people have low taste, they like low things, eat rotten food and have dirty, depraved minds." She turned to the men, and excused herself, saying, "May the gentlemen sitting here please excuse me. If you are not the type who takes a maid for a mistress, then my words don't concern you."

All the men were forced to sit quietly, though in their hearts they wanted to tear the lady to pieces.

"Luang Poh, my husband likes to look at nude pictures," interjected a young woman in her twenties. "He collects pornographic pictures in his bedroom drawers. They are all so obscene I can't stand to look at them."

"Then why do you look at them," asked the monk, smiling.

"I just happened to see them," she excused herself.

"Oh, he laid them out for you to see, did he? It's not that he hid them from you and you searched until you found them, is it?"

The woman smiled sheepishly because, of course, what he said was true.

"This type of person is a psychopath, isn't he? He is old and still he is obscene. In front of others he pretends to read Dhamma, and collects Dhamma books. His cabinet is full of them. But in private he reads men's magazines, collects pornography, and he even puts them in the drawers at the head of the bed. Isn't that psychopathic?"

"I don't know about that, but I do know that you are jealous of a mere picture." There was another roar of laughter, but the woman just pouted. She had come to get an answer to just this question and the Phra Khru had merely made fun of her. She was sure her husband was a sex maniac or even a psychopath. But whatever he was, she had taken his pictures and incinerated them. She didn't want to keep them as a jinx on their household.

"Listen here. The way to solve the problem of an unfaithful husband or wife is not at all difficult. I will tell you how, but you must be able to follow my instructions. If you can't you won't be able to solve the problem. You must have unremitting tolerance and perseverance. There was once a Lady who came to ask my advice about this, and I explained to her what to do, but she didn't follow my instructions and failed."

"And will everyone who follows your instructions be successful?"

"Certainly, one hundred percent. I have researched this matter. It's a pity the Lady didn't believe me. She wasted her time trying to find me and when I explained what to do she didn't take my advice. Her husband was a minister but he fell for a maid. He even built a house for her. The Lady

could only abuse him. Eventually the husband went to live permanently with the servant. Each time someone came to do business with him, they would have to go to the servant's house. She was so furious she came and sat right here to let off steam," he said, pointing to where the fifty year old lady was now sitting.

"Who did she abuse?"

"She abused the man and the maid."

"And could they hear?"

"How could he, he was in Bangkok, over there. I was the one who had to listen to it all. She was really letting loose ... anybody who overheard it would think she was abusing me," he said, laughing dryly.

"Then please let us know the method for dealing with the problem, then we can put it into operation," the thirty year old woman urged.

"It is really quite easy: just don't be angry. No anger or ill-will. Just wish them both happiness and well-being. Wish them long life and love together, never scold them or wish them ill."

"Oh, I can't do that. If you told me to wish them ill I could certainly do that," the thirty year old protested.

"No, you mustn't do that. If you wish them ill, you won't succeed. If you want your husband to return to you and stop meeting the other woman you must do as I've said. You may have to force yourself at first, but after you've done it a few times you'll get used to it. When you are used to it, you won't have to force yourself any more. Many have succeeded in doing this, and I have recorded it all here."

"And was anyone not successful?"

"Just like I told you. If they don't carry out the instructions in full, they don't succeed: like the Lady. If anyone carries out the instructions, they will surely succeed."

"Yes, please continue with your advice."

"Before you wish them well you must pay obeisance and do some chanting. Chant the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, then the Bahum and Mahakaruniko chants once each, then chant the virtues of the Buddha once for each year of your age and then once more. For example, you are thirty years old, so you would chant thirty-one times."

"Then I would have to chant fifty-one times, is that right?" the fifty year old lady spoke up.

"It's not at all difficult. It would take no more than half an hour."

"And how long do we have to wait for results?" the thirty year old lady asked.

"According to what I have recorded, the fastest was one month, the slowest three months. It depends on your concentration. For example, one woman who came to me couldn't radiate any kindness at first. It just wouldn't come. Whenever she thought of the pain she had suffered, instead of wishing her husband happiness, she would wish him destruction. But she kept on trying and eventually she could do it. For her it took three months to succeed."

When the Phra Khru had finished his advice, eight people paid their respects and left, six women and two men.

"Luang Poh, my child's mother has run away again," the third victim complained. He was a middle-aged man, with a haggard and worn face.

Phra Buahyao, sitting and observing the proceedings, felt sorry for the Phra Khru who had to listen to the constant petitioning from people of all walks of life, all with their different problems. Despite this, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan showed no signs of boredom or tiredness. He helped them and listened to their problems attentively even though some of them seemed like nonsense in the eyes of Phra Buahyao.

"Run away again? What have you done to her?" he feigned asking, even though he knew the man was a drunkard and a bully. He had kicked his wife off their house.

"I just used my hands and feet on her little." His answer was not so straight, but he dare not lie as he knew that the Phra Khru could check. Others said that the Phra Khru was clairvoyant.

"Oh, you kicked her off the house, its that what you call 'a little'? If someone kicked you off the house, would you think it was a little?"

"I was wrong, I know it, Luang Poh," he hung his head in shame.

"How many times have you said this? Why didn't you stop to think before you did it? The other day you threw a fork in her face, didn't you?" The man hung his head and didn't reply. The Phra Khru took the opportunity to teach him some more.

"If she hadn't ducked, she would have been blinded. Do you want a blind wife?"

"No, sir."

"Then don't do it again."

"Then when will she return?" he asked, wanting to know the answer. Luang Poh's words were like magic. If he said three days, it was three days.

"She won't return. If you don't stop drinking she definitely won't return. If you stop drinking she will return in one month."

"Will it take a whole month?"

“Yes, but you must be able to stop drinking. You have to chose between liquor and your wife, what’s it to be?”

The man seemed to hesitate. On one hand he liked liquor, but on the other he wanted to choose his wife, as he could not raise his small children alone. The eldest was only eight. The youngest was not yet one year old; without his mother he would surely die.

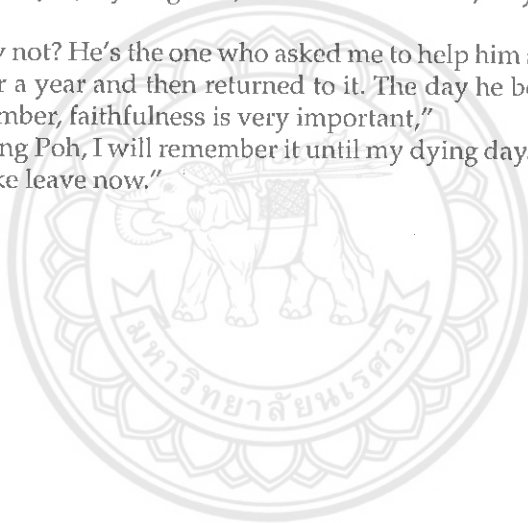
Finally he said, “Luang Poh, I will stop drinking. I cannot raise my children alone.”

“Good, then you must be faithful to your promise. If you are unfaithful, you will die. There are many examples of this, have you heard about them?”

“Yes, sir, Tid Jab, my neighbor, died because of this, do you remember him?”

“Yes, why not? He’s the one who asked me to help him stop drinking. He stopped for a year and then returned to it. The day he began drinking he died. Remember, faithfulness is very important,”

“Yes, Luang Poh, I will remember it until my dying day. I will pay my respect and take leave now.”



Chapter 25

Duang Suda crawled hands and knees towards the Phra Khru, followed by Seng the merchant and Kim Ngor, her parents. The three paid obeisance to the monk three times and then turned to pay obeisance to Phra Buahyao, who sat on the floor in the proper attitude to the right of his preceptor.

"I think I must return to my lodging, Luang Poh, since you have guests," said the young monk, excusing himself even though he wanted to stay and listen to the conversation.

"Why not stay, what's the hurry?" the Abbot said, as if he could read his mind. Then he turned to speak to the guests, "I don't think it's a secret. Phra Buahyao can stay and listen, can't he?"

"Certainly, Luang Poh. In fact I would like a lot of people to come and listen so and bear witness to our story," Duang Suda answered.

"Is that so? Do you want me to ask everyone in the temple to come? Would you like that?" he asked, smiling.

"Not too many, Luang Poh," replied the obese lady. "If you do that I will be too shy to speak."

"Oh, in that case come out with it. I think Phra Buahyao is listening with all ears," the monk said, teasing his student.

"It's Luang Poh who likes to listen. Don't blame it on me," the student argued silently.

"Father, it's better if you tell," the lady changed her mind instantly, thrusting the matter onto her father.

"No, it's better that you tell since you saw the whole incident, right?" Seng the merchant reasoned. He spoke Thai more clearly since he had started practicing meditation, and was no longer ashamed when he was with Kim Ngor.

"Yes, I agree with your Father. You tell it better," her mother added.

"Mother, why do you always side with Dad?" the daughter said, taking her mother to task.

"Is your story a long one? If it is, I would like to advise you to start now and not leave it till tomorrow. I am rather an impatient monk," Phra Buahyao spoke up. He had been thinking about whether to speak up or not for a long time, and finally took the plunge.

"My goodness, since you say that I will have to tell the story then," said Duang Suda, referring to Phra Buahyao as "Luang Phi" ("Venerable elder brother"), but not wholeheartedly, seeing that he was younger. It would have been more appropriate to call him "Luang Nong" ("Venerable younger brother"). She couldn't understand why people don't call younger monks 'Luang Nong.'

"I hope you're not going to have a long preamble like in the ligae plays."

"That won't be necessary, sir. Father, you'd better do the talking," she turned once more to haggle with her father.

"No, better if you do it. Don't beat around the bush, it's irritating. Be considerate of Luang Poh's feelings. His time is money and gold," Seng the merchant reprimanded his daughter. It is said that the practice of meditation leads to wisdom: when wisdom arose for Seng the merchant, he knew that a father should not be intimidated by his daughter, so he dared to reprimand her instead of being reprimanded by her as in former times. Her father's reprimand gave Duang Suda a start, so she began to tell her story.

"It's a very strange story, Luang Poh. I've told it to many people and they wouldn't believe that Father and Mother were shot at with an M16 but weren't hurt. I saw it with my own eyes," she said glibly.

"What were you doing when you were shot?" the monk asked them.

"We were sitting in meditation. Kim Ngor and I vowed to walk meditation for one hour and then sit meditation for another hour. When the robber fired at us, the hour wasn't up yet so I didn't get up or open my eyes," explained Seng the merchant. The incident had happened three months ago. However, his feelings were as strong as if it had happened yesterday.

"Were you aware that robbers had come?" the Phra Khru asked.

"Yes, Luang Poh, I was fully aware all through it, and so was Kim Ngor."

"And were you afraid, afraid of death?"

"No. While I was meditating, I was not afraid. But right now I am,"

Kim Ngor answered nervously.

"Then where were you at that time, the time the robber raided you?" the Phra Khru asked Duang Suda.

"Me? I was so afraid I crawled under a couch. I don't know how I did it, my body is big and the couch is so low. Normally I couldn't even get my leg under it, let alone my whole body."

Phra Buahyao looked at her leg, which was like a log, and seemed to agree with what she said. He couldn't restrain himself, and asked, "As you say, I wonder how high it was. Was it as high as Luang Poh's seat?"

The lady looked over at the seat in front of her and said, "About that height, yes, maybe a little higher, two inches at the most. Unbelievable isn't it, that a plump woman like me could hide under that couch. Can you believe it, Luang Phi?"

"If you wanted me to believe it, you would have to go under it again. Do you want to try?" the young monk dared.

"No need to, Buahyao. Even if you do not believe it, I will. I believe that it's possible. Haven't you heard of what people say? People have been known to carry large earthen jars and refrigerators in their panic to escape fire. When the panic is gone, they can't carry them back. This is psychic power. People don't realize that their mind has a tremendous amount of power. It's hidden inside them. People who train their mind regularly can make use of that psychic power, but people who have never practiced do not know how to—in normal situations, that is. Only when they are frightened can they bring it up subconsciously. Use of psychic power without mind control is only momentary. When they become aware of it they can't use it again," the Phra Khru explained.

"And is it any good, Luang Poh?" Phra Buahyao asked.

"Is what any good?" His mentor did not understand the question.

"Psychic power, is it good or bad?"

"It is difficult to answer. It's like a two-edged sword. If it is put to good use, it will do good. But if the use is not good, it can do you harm." Seeing that his listeners still did not understand, he explained further. "For example, if psychic power is used for practicing meditation, as a means to an end, that is, the cessation of suffering and Nibbana, then it is a good thing. But if it is used wrongly, for example, for the purpose of displaying magical power or super human states, it is not good, because it is used for increasing defilements, not giving them up."

"Does that mean that my crawling under the low table was psychic power, Luang Poh?" asked Duang Suda.

"That's right, madam. Even though you have never trained the mind, you were still able to use it. That is use without awareness, which cannot be controlled. If you want to control psychic power, you have to train the mind seriously, like your father and mother."

"Then the robber firing an M16 at me and the shot not coming out was because of psychic power, right Luang Poh?" the merchant asked. Practicing insight meditation everyday had made him understand Dhamma clearer.

"That is also correct, but I think that one reason the bullet wouldn't enter was because of the power of your love of truth. Another reason was because of the power of meditation or psychic power. Why don't you try telling the story from beginning to end? I would like to record it in order for others to listen." The venerable turned and called Somchai to bring him the tape recorder and a cassette. When everything was ready, Duang Suda began her story.

"That day I took a taxi to see Father and Mother at home. When I went upstairs, I saw they were sitting meditating so I walked to the kitchen and took a chicken drumstick to eat. Just then I heard a loud noise downstairs, so I walked to the stairs and leaned over and saw four or five thugs tying the two servants around the head and mouth. I was so frightened I ran to my parents and said to them 'Robbers, robbers!' They wouldn't open their eyes. Then I heard footsteps approaching so I ran to the bathroom, thinking I would hide in there, but then changed my mind and rushed back and crawled under the couch. Excuse me, Luang Poh, but the chicken drumstick was in my mouth the whole time. That was a good thing, because it meant I couldn't cry out. If not for the drumstick, I would have cried for help and then they would have shot me.

"When they came up, they walked toward Father and shook him, saying, 'Old man, wake up, this is a robbery.' Father wouldn't open his eyes, so they turned to shake Mother saying, 'Lady, lady, wake up. We've come to rob you.' Mother just sat still also. I heard a voice say, 'Shoot them, shoot them!' and felt like passing out. I wanted to cry out to tell Father and Mother, but couldn't because of the drumstick in my mouth. One of them put the gun at Father's head and pulled the trigger. There was a clicking sound but no bullets came out. So he turned to shoot Mother and the same thing happened.

"Finally they started gathering things. They took the TV, radio, stereo, and some antiques and carried them downstairs, probably to put them in their car. I was watching. After they finished gathering things, they went downstairs. When my fright had subsided, I took the drumstick out of my mouth, but I could not crawl out of the couch, so I lay there feeling very

oppressed for about 20 minutes or so. Then I heard someone walking up the stairs. When I saw the police, I was so glad, I shouted. 'Help! Help!' The police looked around to find where the noise came from, so I told them 'Under the couch, under the couch!' Two policemen tried to lift the couch but couldn't. It took four people to lift it enough for me to come out. The five robbers were neatly handcuffed." The narrator stopped to breathe hard a couple of times as if she had forgotten to breathe while telling the story.

The Phra Khru then asked her father, "When the police came, were you aware?"

"Yes, I was Luang Poh. I was aware all the time. The police came to shake me saying, 'Merchant, wake up, you've been robbed. Do you know that?' and I answered, 'I know, I know.' He said in that case I should open my eyes. I said, 'It's not time yet, I can't.' Then I said no more."

"Yes, it looked so funny. Both the police and the robbers had to wait while Father sat there. Then the alarm clock went off loudly. Father and Mother started to move and changed their postures from meditation posture to polite squatting posture, putting their hands together to radiate goodwill and merit."

"And do you know how to radiate goodwill and merit?" asked the venerable, taking this opportunity to test Duang Suda's knowledge.

"Yes, I chant every night. After that I wish others happiness. Would you like to listen, Luang Poh? I will chant it for you."

"Yes, good, chant in Pali. There's no need to translate it because if you can chant in Pali you can translate it, right?"

"Yes, but maybe that's only half true, because some people can say the Pali words but can't translate them, like me for example."

"As for me, I think it's less than half true, Luang Poh," Phra Buahyao cut in, "because most people who know how to chant do not know how to translate. Some do not even know what the chants mean, even monks. Like Phra Buahyao for example." The young monk did not realize that he had "laid down his hands" for his spiritual teacher to see.

"There's an old saying 'silence is golden.' Phra Buahyao, if you had not spoken up, I would not have known that you are still very unlearned. I think I will have to ask Phra Maha Boon to train you harder. Then when he becomes a teacher himself he won't be disgraced."

The Abbot then turned to ask Duang Suda's father, "Do you agree? People who have real knowledge are hard to find. People who know a lot are easy to find, there are many people in this age who know a lot, but they do not really know anything."

"I agree. Then there are those who know a lot and use their knowledge to take advantage of others. That's why society is in so much disorder," Seng the merchant added.

"That's how it is. Then a lot of people get sick and the psychiatrists get a lot of work to do," the Phra Khru added.

"I think the psychiatrists themselves are sick, Luang Poh. Many that I have seen are not as normal as they should be."

"Maybe it's because they have to mix with their patients a lot, and so they catch their illnesses. Is that so, Luang Poh?" Kim Ngor asked.

"It could be. I have noticed that the more civilized the world has become, the more neurotic people are."

"People who are neurotic should come here to do insight meditation, shouldn't they?" she asked like one who never practiced.

"No, no that doesn't work. Those who are a little sick get very sick and those who are very sick go beyond the point of no return. Seriously neurotic people should never practice insight meditation. This is clearly authorized in the Buddha's words. If I am not mistaken, it's in volume 14. The Buddha said, 'Monks, I do not instruct mad people to have mindfulness in breathing.' We had an example here at this temple. I think I told Phra Buahyao some time ago about an instructor of a certain university. She was neurotic and her relatives brought her to do insight meditation here. The first two days were all right, but on the third she got up and did Thai dancing. They brought me to see her. She could dance very prettily. Nobody could stop her. So you must remember, do not bring neurotics to do insight. Take them to the hospital to be cured first. Once they get better, then you must wait another two or three years. If they are newly cured, do not bring them because they might have a relapse. There have been many examples of this."

"Luang Poh, Luang Poh! Excuse me sir, but do you mind if I say that I would rather hear about the robbery. It's getting exciting," Phra Buahyao spoke with the utmost deference.

"I don't mind, but I do not know if the narrator would like to continue or not."

"Sure I will continue." She turned to her mother, "Where were we up to, Mother?"

"You were up to the part where Father and Mother were chanting, spreading good will to all beings. Then Luang Poh told you to recite the chant," Kim Ngor reminded her.

"Then not to waste time, I will summarize it. The short words for radi-

ating kindness are *sabbe satta avera abyapajjha anigha sukhi attanam pariharantu*. The words for wishing others well begin with *idam me matapitunam hotu sukhita hotu matapituro*."

"And if you wish yourself well, what do you say?"

"*Aham sukhito homi*," she answered loud and clear.

"Good, I believe you. Now you can continue the story of the robbery."

"After Father and Mother had finished, the police made an inquiry, and they also interrogated me. I told them what I had seen. The police said they saw a pick-up driving past them. They had a hunch and asked the men where they were taking their things. The men looked suspicious and they each answered differently. Finally they confessed that they had just robbed someone, and they brought the police to our house."

"When was that? Was it day or night?"

"In the evening," Seng the merchant answered.

"Every evening from four o'clock to six o'clock Kim Ngor and I practice insight meditation, walking meditation for one hour and sitting meditation for another hour."

"That's very good. I would like to express my appreciation. See how the power of good deeds has turned disaster into goodness? When you are going to lose things, you won't lose them. There is a similar example of this. A couple from Bangrachan village came to learn insight at the temple and returned home to practice it every night. One night while they were practicing, some burglars came to steal their buffaloes. They drove the whole herd out. One of them lead the buffaloes out, while another kept watch. Just then one of the robbers looked up by chance and saw two people walking to and fro, saying, 'right step ... left step ...' They were just walking like that in the dark. The robber thought it was strange and that the owners of the house were having nightmares. He got frightened and backed up into a sleeping dog. The dog woke up and barked loudly, and then the villagers woke, came to see and were able to arrest one of the robbers. Then they helped one another light torches and bring the buffaloes back into the stable again.

"The headman caught only the robber who was left to watch over the house. The others got away. The villagers came and waited until the couple had finished meditation, then they told them the story. The couple told them that they had known about the robbery since the robbers herded the buffaloes out, but they had to maintain their determination to walk one hour and to sit another hour, even if it meant losing the buffaloes. Then they came to tell me about it here." The venerable pointed to where Duang

Suda was sitting.

"Both the wife and the husband came. They lived at Amphur Bangrachan." The Phra Khru told a similar story to the three who listened. Phra Buahyao had heard it twice because when the couple had come to tell, he was sitting there listening too.

"But in your case, you could catch all the thieves," the young monk said to the old man in his seventies.

"Yes, all of them. The robbers and the police were equal in numbers, five each. They were the patrol police who were driving to inspect the streets. I thought I was very lucky."

"How many years did the robbers get?" Phra Buahyao asked again.

"None. They were jailed for 3 months since I didn't want to go and identify them. I said I couldn't remember their faces. Actually I could, Luang Poh, but I said I couldn't in order to avoid building up further hatred. The person who came to rob me was one of my debtors. He had borrowed many thousands and wouldn't give any back, so I threatened to call the police. He was angry so he brought his friends to rob me and shoot me. Maybe he wanted me dead to clear the debt. It was the merit I accumulated in doing insight meditation that saved my life. Thinking about it, I saw that if I took them to jail, someday they would come out and seek revenge, which would be creating enmity that would never end. In order to stop this enmity, I said that I did not remember the suspects' faces.

"The police jailed them for less than 3 months. During that time Kim Ngor and I radiated kindness and performed acts of forgiveness to them daily. Luang Poh, do you believe it? The strength of kindness is wonderful. Yesterday they all came to my house with incense sticks to beg my forgiveness. They asked me to forgive them and thanked me for not taking any action against them. After my debtor had begged my forgiveness, he told me he would pay the debt by installment and would not cheat me for a single penny.

"I was so overwhelmed my tears flowed. Kim Ngor cried, too. I forgave him and told him not to worry about the debt. If they got it they could return it. If they couldn't get it, then I would give them the money. The only thing I asked of them was to do honest work. I wanted so much to come see you, Luang Poh, so I asked my daughter to bring me here to pay obeisance and thank you. You have given me magical knowledge." He bent his head to the floor and paid obeisance to the Phra Khru three times, so touched and overwhelmed with gladness that the tears rolled down his cheeks. Kim Ngor did the same, except she didn't cry.

Chapter 26

The Phra Khru left Wat Ambhavan at four in the morning. He was going to bless the wedding ceremony of the daughter of a student of his, which had been arranged in Suphanburi Province. He had left early in order to be on time to have his midday meal at Ban Laem Temple, on the occasion of the abbot's sixth cycle birthday.

The car came out of the Wat and turned into the Asian Highway, then turned right toward Ayudhya. Within about an hour it reached Amphur Muang, where the houses were built closely along both sides of the road. As the car was passing one of the houses, the monk asked the driver to stop.

"Somchai, park here a minute. What's that noise coming from that house so early in the morning? Are they doing their morning chanting? Stop for a minute so I can hear more clearly. Which chant is that—the *Jinabañjara* Verses or the '*Summit of the Tipitaka*'?"

After Somchai had stopped the car, the monk rolled down the side window, and they could both hear it loud and clear:

"You lousy bitch ... " came a man's voice. "You're worse than a whore. You're good for nothing. The whores are better than you." Then the woman's voice retorted,

"Oh, that's right! That's why you like to go to sleep with whores, and then you give me the disease. Your old wife was a whore too, wasn't she?"

The Phra Khru could listen to no more. He asked Somchai to start the car. As a matter of fact he could have listened alone by using his 'perceiving', even without stopping the car, but he wanted Somchai to stop the car to give him a teaching.

"That's a terrible thing, to get up so early in the morning and curse each other. When I get back, I think I will have to wash my ears. It's really

inauspicious to have passed by at a time when people are cursing each other like this," the monk muttered as if to himself. When he saw that the listener was silent, he continued, "How can they expect to prosper, quarreling like this? The guardian deities would all run away. If you ever have a wife and children, don't you follow their example."

"Of course, Luang Poh, there's no way I would follow such a bad example. What kind of man would abuse a woman like that? If I were the wife, I wouldn't live with him. I don't know how she could stand it," Somchai reasoned.

"She's concerned for her son. Or I should say, she's made bad karma and so she's met bad people."

"I reckon no man who curses so fluently could be a good man. A good man wouldn't curse like that."

"It doesn't matter if they are men or women, if they are good at cursing it's unlikely that they will be good people. Some people say, 'Bad mouth, good heart,' but it's not true. If he were really kind, he would not use bad language. That's why the Lord Buddha emphasized mental karma so much: because it is the cause of verbal and physical karma. People who talk and do evil do so because of their evil thoughts. The Buddha gave a teaching about this, Somchai. I remember it clearly, since I always use it to teach myself ... I would like to quote it for you. I think it applies well to that foul-mouthed man."

Somchai slowed the car in order to hear more clearly. The Phra Khru, who was sitting in the front seat beside him, turned and said,

"The Lord Buddha said: 'Abusive language is like a hoe, which is an object for digging into and cutting down. It is an instrument of destruction for ruffians who speak foul language. It only arises in the mouths of fools. Whosoever praises those who deserve to be condemned, or condemns those who deserve to be praised, accumulates blame on account of which he will find no happiness.'"

"That man praising a whore as better than his wife was praising one who should be condemned, is that right, sir?"

"That's right."

"I believe he must be so infatuated with the body, taste, smell, sound and touch of that whore that he can't see above her. He is so infatuated that he uses her attributes to scold his own wife. And his old wife was a whore, wasn't she, sir?" the young man asked. He knew that the monk could give the answer. He only needed to close his eyes and he could know everything he wanted to know.

"True or not, that's their business. It's time we stopped talking about

others. I was only giving an example for you to see. Later on, when you become the head of a family, you will be able to act appropriately to your station, so that your wife will respect you and be considerate of your feelings. Don't let her despise you. I only want this. I don't want you to analyze or find out about his old wife. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand sir," the driver answered in a weary tone. If the monk was not allowing him to look into the matter, he had no choice but to keep quiet and set his mind to driving them to the destination on time.

Before leaving Suphanburi Province to go to Samutsongkram, the Phra Khru told Somchai to stop the car at a florists in town to buy a basket of flowers to congratulate the elderly monk whose birthday he had come for. It was his habit to always take something for the host. It was known among the monastery adherents that Luang Poh Charoen was a great giver. Be it Dhamma or anything else, when someone was asking for them, he would give them away impartially. Destitute villagers often came to ask for rice from Wat Ambhavan to eke out an existence. Some also asked for hand outs of chilies, onions, and garlic. But the thing that he gave freely, even without the asking, was Dhamma.

Not only did the villagers come to beg. Even monks from nearby temples had on occasion gone to ask for a share of requisites as no-one had offered them, and he would always share them without much ceremony.

Sometimes the monastery's supporters asked him not to give so much away because they were afraid their own temple would run out. The Phra Khru taught them to be kind to others. The words he always used were, "don't begrudge giving, and you won't be destitute; when it's gone, something else will come;" and "the more you give, the more you grow."

And it seemed to be true. Many times it looked as if supplies were running out, but then there was always someone to offer more, so that Wat Ambhavan had never experienced real deprivation, even once. There was always someone offering rice, shrimp paste, fish sauce, chilies, and onions at the temple.

His saying—"the more you give the more you grow"—had become the unofficial motto of Wat Ambhavan. However, the Phra Khru often emphasized to all the people who came to see him that the greatest and most deserving gift was the gift of Dhamma. As the Buddha said: '*Sabbadanam dhammadanam jinati*: "The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts.'

The Phra Khru did not actually eat the meal at Wat Ban Laem with the other monks. He merely considered each kind of food, and then set his mind to radiate kindness to those who came to offer it so that they received

their merits. Some of the patrons who did not understand thought that the monk was eating food with his eyes.

One male patron crawled forward on hands and knees, put his hands together, and said, "Please Luang Poh, have something to eat. I suspect the food isn't to your liking—is that why you don't eat?"

Not wanting him to lose heart, the Phra Khru placed one ball of sweetened egg into his mouth. He did this twice, then he lifted his glass to drink. Seeing the monk eat something, the patron withdrew.

While waiting for other monks to finish eating, the monk looked out in front of him. About 100 meters away was a girls' technical school. A young teacher, aged not more than thirty, was standing, teaching in front of her class. The monk wanted to know what instruction this teacher was giving to her students, so he used his 'perceiving' to listen in.

"Today, students, I am going to teach you the secret of leading a successful life," the instructor said to her young students, who were aged around seventeen or eighteen.

"You all are becoming ladies now. I will tell you the secret: Don't get married. The old saying says: 'A child burdens your body, a husband burdens your heart. If you stay single, your face will be as white as pearls.' Therefore, don't ever get married."

"Why, that's very good. This teacher teaches really well. I wonder if she's going to lead her students to become nuns," thought the Phra Khru. Then he continued to listen attentively:

"Take me for example. I lead a free life, have a beautiful house, a car to drive, and I don't need a husband. We can earn the money ourselves, you see? Do you want to get rich the short way?" she asked her students.

"Yes, Miss, we'd love to," all the students answered as one.

"Then I'll tell you how. I guarantee if you follow my advice, you will all live in comfort and be free and have money to spend. The easy way is to sleep with whoever you want to, but only choose those who have heavy pockets. Don't ever be friends with a person who is broke. You will only waste your body. Well, what do you think? Do you think this kind of life is good? You can get a lot of money each time, and you won't get tired."

"Sounds good, Miss," only two or three answered. It seemed that most of the class did not agree with the teacher's odd theory.

"And if the man has a wife, wouldn't it be sinful to take away another woman's husband?" one of the doubters spoke up.

"His wife is his wife. We don't want to make him our husband, just borrow him for a while," the young teacher answered.

"Then that's just like being a prostitute, Miss," one student spoke up testily.

"Hey, you speak well of me Sujitra, or you will lose marks," the instructor threatened.

"But I think Sujitra has made a point," said another student, who sat next to the first one.

"What? You, too, Jiraporn. I didn't think I would have two such foolish students." The young teacher's words quickly silenced any other students who did not agree. When no-one else opposed her, she continued:

"Of my teacher friends, not one is married. They do just what I am doing. There's nothing shameful about it. If we just tried to live on our monthly salaries, we would starve to death. Your whole life, you wouldn't get a car to drive. Do you know how much a teacher gets?" she spoke contemptuously of her honest profession.

The Phra Khru wanted to beat his chest with frustration. He never would have guessed that he would be hearing such statements. Or was it that now teachers had changed their ways of teaching? How depressing. He would like to know what the Minister of Education would do if he heard of this. And that the teacher had claimed that her friends did the same as she did showed that she was not alone in teaching this way. He felt sorry for the students, the future of the nation, to have teachers with such wrong attitudes.

The Phra Khru related the story of the young lady teacher to Somchai while traveling back to Wat Ambhavan.

"Is it true sir, Luang Poh? It seems so unlikely."

"Oh, you think I am lying, do you?" he countered evenly

"No, sir, no. I believe you, Luang Poh, but I find it hard to believe that a teacher could be so perverted. It's a sad state of affairs for our nation. People nowadays are getting more and more decadent. They're so interested in bodily pleasure they forget virtue. What kind of day is it, Luang Poh, that we seem to have met two bad incidents?"

"It's Thursday," answered the Phra Khru blandly. Seeing the other party did not say anything, he said continued, "Later on, make a stop at Ang Thong for me. I would like to make a little visit to Patron Pun. Do you remember the way to Patron Pun's house?"

"Yes, sir. Luang Poh, you have a rest. I will let you know when we get there." At Somchai's words, the Phra Khru closed his eyes. Somchai thought the monk had gone to sleep, but in fact he was fixing his mind on radiating goodwill to all the spirits awaiting rebirth, and he did so for the length of

the journey.

Those who had died because of car accidents were often born as *sambhavesi*, wandering spirits seeking existence. That is, they could not yet take birth according to their karma because at the time of their death their minds were in neutral states, neither good nor bad. If they died while their mind was in a good state, they would be born into a blissful state of existence. If they died with their minds in an evil state, they would be born into woeful states of existence, such as the hell realms, hungry ghosts, demons, or animals. As for those who died while the mind was neutral, they would be born as spirits seeking rebirth. Whenever these spirits remembered the karma they had done, they would be born into the existence appropriate to their karma.

The Phra Khru sat radiating goodwill to spirits along the way until they reached the intersection into Ang Thong Province. There was a car crash in front of them which had caused a long traffic build-up. Somchai turned to the Phra Khru as if he were going to say something, but when he saw that the monk was sleeping, he said nothing. However, as if he had read his driver's mind, the monk spoke up:

"There's a car crash in front of us. Three people dead. If you do not believe me, take a look. The police are looking at the bodies."

"People die really often around here, sir. They say the spirits of people killed in accidents haunt the place," Somchai said as he brought the car to a stop behind the line of cars. He did not need to go look, because he knew what the Phra Khru said needed no verification.

"It's not the ghost of a person who died a violent death, Somchai. It's the ghost of a woman who died with child," the Phra Khru announced after examining the situation with his heightened perception.

"Why does it haunt this place, Luang Poh?"

"It's because of her desire for revenge. This woman was having labor pains. The midwife who was trying to deliver the baby was at her wit's end as the baby would not come out. They carried the woman from her village to send her to hospital in town. When they reached the intersection, they tried to flag down a car, but no-one would stop. There was no bus because it was dark. She was in agony until she died. Since then she has been seeking revenge on those who drive this way. Her malice has caused many accidents. This is the hundredth death, I believe," he said, recounting the event that had happened about six months ago.

"And is it bad karma, Luang Poh, to do that?" Somchai asked curiously.

"Of course it's bad karma. Why not?"

"Then ghosts can make karma, too, is that right, Luang Poh?"

"Anybody can make karma. Ghosts, humans or celestial beings, if they commit bad karma, all receive the results. Just like this woman's ghost wandering around making bad karma with the people who use this road. She is just collecting more bad karma."

"Then why doesn't she go to hell, Luang Poh? Why doesn't the Lord of the Underworld take her to be punished? Why does he let her continue to cause trouble for others?"

"It is difficult to say, Somchai. If vengeance is very strong it can withstand the power of karma. But not forever. In the end, she will have to atone for the karma she has done."

"That means that the ghost of the woman who died with child must go to receive her punishment in hell? Is that right, sir?"

"Something like that."

"And will it be long before she is punished?"

"It depends on the power of goodness and the power of the bad deeds that she has done. If the power of goodness is strong, not long after this she will realize that what she is doing is sinful, and she will stop. But if the power of evil is strong, she will go on collecting bad karma until the law of karma does its duty."

"And can you help her a little, Luang Poh? Can you help her to realize her sins faster so she will stop building bad karma by harming others?" he asked with concern.

"I am thinking of trying, but I do not put much hope in her listening to me. If she had wrong view while living, she will still have it after death. If this were not so, then people who come to be born into this world would all be good, right? Because each person has to die and be reborn countless times."

"If that's so, why don't you try speaking to her? Perhaps she will believe you and then the people who use this road can be safe from accidents," Somchai advised.

"Okay, I will try." Then the monk sat straight, closed his eyes and composed his mind in order to negotiate with the vengeful ghost.

"Excuse me, I would like to talk to you a bit," he said to the pregnant woman who appeared in his mind's eye. The ghost floated until it stopped in front of him, raising its hands in an attitude of respect and greeting him, "Venerable Phra Khru Charoen, isn't it? Aren't you the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan?"

"Do you know me?" the monk asked with surprise.

"Yes, I do. I went to make merit at Wat Ambhavan three or four times. You even asked me to meditate. It's just that I was pregnant with my first child, so I couldn't go. I thought if my child was born, then I would find a chance to go. Only I died first—with my child inside me." She began to sob, and continued,

"People are very cruel. No-one would stop to take me to hospital. I was in agony until I died in utter anguish."

"Then you wrought some revenge, is that right? The three bodies up front are your work, is that so?" asked the Phra Khru reproachfully.

"I wanted revenge," she said softly.

"And by doing this, can you stop feeling malice? Have the people you've killed ever done you any malice? They are different people, aren't they? Or do you remember the people who would not let you get in their cars?"

"No, I cannot remember, sir."

"And since you cannot remember, how can you go about hurting others? It's not right. Do you know that you are making more bad karma? You alone will be the receiver of its results. Stop it. I would like to ask for an offering. Can you give it to me?" the monk asked, radiating kindness toward her.

When she received the stream of kindness that he had radiated to her, the vengeful ghost repented. She bowed to the Phra Khru and said:

"I will stop, Luang Poh. I will. From this day onward I will stop building bad karma. But for others I do not know, sir. Some will believe me, but some are very stubborn." She meant the ghosts of others who had died through the accidents caused by her malice.

"In a minute I will radiate my kindness to them, and then you can go to tell them. After that you can enter into the villagers' dreams to ask them to make merits to wipe out all ills from the road. You can ask your friends to help. With many voices, the villagers will believe you," the monk advised.

"Luang Poh, will I go to hell? I know I will surely have to go to hell. Luang Poh, please, help me," she begged, terrified of the torment that would result from the bad karma she had committed.

"I cannot help you much. You have to bear the karma that you have made. Changing your heart has done a lot of good for you, because you will not go to hell for long. I'd like to say good-bye." The monk mindfully opened his eyes.

It was just as the highway police were taking the bodies and the car remains out of the way, and the traffic was able to move again.

"Were you successful, Luang Poh?" Somchai asked as he drove slowly behind the cars in front.

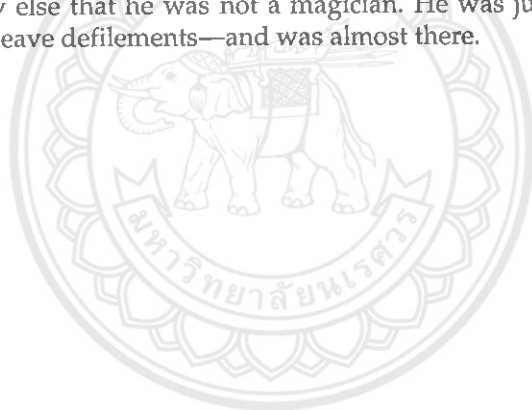
"Luckily she knows me, so we are able to talk easily. It must be because she has some merit. If she was stubborn, she would have been making bad karma for a long time to come."

"And do you know her, Luang Poh?"

"No, I don't. She said she used to make merit at Wat Ambhavan. Since there were hundreds and thousands of people who came to make merits, how can I remember her? If I could, I'd be a magician."

"But everybody thinks that you are a magician anyway. If not, how could you talk to a ghost?" Somchai persisted.

"Step on it, will you, we have to get to patron Pan's house." He cut the conversation short. He couldn't be bothered trying to explain to Somchai or anybody else that he was not a magician. He was just someone who wanted to leave defilements—and was almost there.



Chapter 27

Somchai brought the car to a halt in front of a big house with a sloping roof. A pack of dogs came running toward them, barking loudly. Nobody came to chase the dogs away. The Phra Khru radiated goodwill to the dogs, then told Somchai, "Go on, you can leave the car. I guarantee your safety."

The young man opened the car door timidly and walked around to the other side to open the door for the monk. The pack of dogs ran up to them wagging their tails and whining in welcome.

The Phra Khru led Somchai up to the house. They met Mrs. Pun lying sick in her bed on the verandah, her mattress wet with urine and pus, the air foul.

"Patron Pun, I have come to visit you," he said in greeting. Somchai lifted a chair for him to sit beside her bed.

"Is that you, Luang Poh? You have come to visit me? I am so grateful," she said, lifting her hands in respect. She had been paralyzed for five or six years.

"Somchai, where are the gifts?" the monk asked, referring to the things he had brought from Wat Ambhavan.

"They're in the car, sir. Wait a minute, I will get them for you." He went down stairs and in a short while came back with a small tray. In it was a can of Ovaltine, fresh milk, and condensed milk. He placed it beside the bed and backed away to sit further away because he couldn't stand the smell.

"You've come to visit me, that's good enough, you needn't have brought anything," Patron Pun said, afraid of offending the monk.

"That's all right, Patron. I'm only too happy to help in any way I can. Think nothing of it. You are alone, are you? Where is the man?" he asked,

referring to her husband.

"He has gone to the fields to look at the harvesting. We hired some harvesters for twenty baht a day, so he has to oversee the work. It seems ten have come today."

"And have you eaten anything yet? Can you help yourself?" the monk asked with concern.

"No problem, Luang Poh. This morning Tid fed me before going to the fields. In the afternoon he came back to feed me again. Eating isn't any problem, it's urinating and stooling that's the problem. They stink a lot." She said, afraid of offending the Phra Khru. She knew he could not stand the smell. Even his spiritual student had moved further away.

The Phra Khru had had to set his mindfulness on "smell, smell," because he had long been a lover of cleanliness.

"Where are your children? You have many children, haven't you?" he asked, mentally scolding her children for leaving her alone like this.

"They all have families of their own and have moved away. Since I distributed the land to them, 300 rai each, not one of them has shown his face here again. There's only the youngest daughter left, she's studying for a master's degree. Two or three days ago, she came to tell me to come up with about twenty thousand for her, she says she wants to publish a book."

A car horn sounded in front of the house. The Phra Khru turned to see a lead-colored BMW coming to a halt beside his van. The driver was a woman aged around twenty-five, accompanied by five other women of the same age. The pack of dogs ran toward them but was driven away by the driver.

"I'll just go upstairs for a while to get the money from mother. I don't know if she has it yet," she said as she led the group up the stairs. Seeing the monk sitting beside her mother, she paid the customary obeisance.

"Who have you come to see," the monk asked her in greeting

"I came to see my mother. I am the daughter of this person who is lying in bed," she said, pointing to her mother. As for her friends, they waited at a distance.

"It's good that you've come, would you mind helping to wash your mother's skirts and sheets? The smell of her urine and feces is dreadful."

"No, I cannot, Luang Poh, I'm in a hurry." She glanced across at her friends, who winked at her as a sign "not to wash."

"What's the hurry?"

"We have to go to the funeral of one of my friend's relatives in Ayudhya," she answered, irritated by the questions.

"Why don't you wash your mother's clothes first and then go, it would only take twenty minutes, I'm sure."

The girl turned to look at her friends, who made another sign "not to wash." She turned to the Phra Khru, "I'm sorry, Luang Poh, my friends are waiting."

"Let them wait a while, there's nothing wrong with that."

"I'm afraid we will be late for the funeral," she answered curtly, feeling irritated. What does a monk have to do with her? Even her own mother wouldn't dare ask for her service.

The Phra Khru knew the young woman's thoughts. His persistence to have her wash her mother's clothes was to help counteract some of her karma. But her displeasure showed plainly on her face. The monk then said loudly, "I beg your pardon, I would like to ask you a question. Does the person who died have any more importance to you than your mother? And if you do not go, will the funeral rites be called off?" he asked with irony. But she took no interest and turned to her mother.

"Mother, the twenty thousand baht, did you get it? The money I asked for to publish my thesis."

"I cannot find it yet, child. Your father is still busy with the harvest so he hasn't time to go looking for someone to borrow money from," Patron Pun said timidly, afraid of offending her daughter.

"And when will I get it? I told you days ago," the daughter almost shouted. The Phra Khru took the opportunity to cut in:

"Where do you study, miss?"

"I'm studying for a Master's Degree in Bangkok. I was doing a thesis, and I came to ask for money to publish it," she said proudly, feeling more comfortable now that the monk was asking her about her studies.

"Oh, you're studying a master's degree. At what institution is this?"

The young lady told him, one of the most famous universities in Thailand.

The monk then said, "It's amazing that a person like you could study in such a fine institution."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it taints the name of the institution," he said bluntly.

"How can it be tainted? What wrong have I done?"

"You have done wrong in that you have no gratitude in your heart. Your mother lies sick in bed. Instead of helping her, you see your friend's relative as more important. I want to speak straight out like this. It's a pity you are studying so high but you have no morals. Remember, knowledge

must go with morals. With only knowledge but no morals, you cannot be a good person."

The Phra Khru gave an uninvited sermon. He knew that this lady would have to receive heavy karma, and he wanted to lighten it, so he taught her even though he knew she would be offended. Out of his desire not to see people meet with bad karma, he added tenderly, "I beg of you. Would you help take your mother's clothes to be washed? Then you will prosper. If it were not inappropriate, I would bow to you right now."

"I'm not going to wash her. Can't you see I'm in a hurry? If you want her to be washed, wash her yourself," said the student rudely.

"If she was my mother, I would wash her without hesitation. But I cannot do it because it is against the monks' rules. A monk can only wash a woman who is his mother, no-one else."

"What rule? I don't care about your rules. Mother, I must go. Don't forget to find the money for me," she said as she walked down from the house with her friends, neglecting to pay obeisance to the Phra Khru.

The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan looked with a heavy heart as the BMW drove off. He turned to speak to Patron Pun:

"This is no good at all. How did you bring up your children to be like this?"

"It's my karma, Luang Poh," Pun said, crying. "She says she wants money to publish her book. I don't know where I can get it from. I have divided all the property. She sold all three hundred rai in exchange for one car. I warned her but she wouldn't listen," Pun sobbed.

"It's a good thing it's your daughter. If she were mine I would disinherit her."

"Please don't blame her. It's my own karma," said Pun, who couldn't help taking sides with her daughter.

"May I ask, since you have been lying sick like this, has your daughter ever washed your clothes for you, the clothes stained with feces and urine?"

"No, never, she hates it. She leaves it to Tid, who does it all for me," she said, referring to her husband.

Hardly had she finished speaking when Mr. Kum walked up the steps. Seeing the Phra Khru, he came forward, squatted down and bowed to him.

"Luang Poh, when did you get here?"

"I just arrived a while ago. How are things? How many rai did you get harvested?"

"About three or four rai. Today I hired ten people. Just a minute, I will get you some water," he said, preparing to get up. But the Phra Khru mo-

tioned for him to stop.

"That is not necessary, I have already had a drink. You are tired, you should rest for a minute. I will be leaving shortly."

"Tid, our daughter was just here asking for the money," Pun told her husband.

"And what did you do? What did you tell her?"

"I told her we haven't found it yet. She seemed very angry."

"Your daughter is bad. I asked her to help wash her mother's clothes, but she refused," the Phra Khru informed him.

"She is just too much, Luang Poh. She believes that she is more learned than her parents, so she won't believe anything we try to teach her. She looks down on her parents because we only finished grade 4 education. I don't think she will prosper—not that I denounce my daughter," Kum spoke wearily, disappointed that he could not bring up his children as he wished.

"Do not blame it on the child, Tid. It's my karma," Pun censured her husband, as she tried with difficulty to move herself. Lying in one position for years had turned the flesh of her back into a chronic ulcer, from which pus constantly flowed.

"You always take sides with her, that's why she is like this," Kum said.

"But it's true, Luang Poh, do you believe me? It is my own karma, I did the same to my mother, so now my own daughter does the same to me. I will tell you the story." She stopped to breathe heavily two or three times, then began to relate her story in a low voice.

"My mother was paralyzed for many years. I never washed her clothes for her. At that time I lived with my grandmother, not my mother. When grandmother sent me with food for my mother, I just laid it down for her and went straight back to my grandmother's house. My mother once asked me to wash her clothes, but I wouldn't do it. When my father came home from working in the fields he had to wash her clothes for her.

"I stayed with my grandmother and never once went to help nurse my mother. We lived in a separate house. My grandmother cooked food for her and had me take it to my mother everyday. When I had sent the food, I went straight home. Never once did I help wash her clothes. That is why I do not get angry with my daughter for not washing my clothes," Pun related.

"Oh, that's how it is, then." Now the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan understood how the law of karma was operating with Pun's daughter. But he did not reveal what he had seen to the couple as he did not want to cause them

worry.

"I think I must say good-bye now, then you can have a rest." When she knew that the monk was leaving, Pun suddenly felt pain all over her body. Talking to him had made her forget the pain. She cried out loudly, "Luang Poh, I suffer so much. Please help me!"

"You've practiced insight meditation, haven't you? I remember you spending many days at Wat Ambhavan."

"Yes, I went twice before I fell ill. The first time I stayed for seven days, the second for fifteen days."

"There, you can use that knowledge to save yourself."

"How can I use it, Luang Poh? I have forgotten all of it, since I haven't practiced much since I left the temple. After I became sick, I gave it up altogether."

"That's all right. If you've forgotten it, I can refresh your memory. It's still better than wholly beginning anew. Once you have done it, there is always something there. Listen, whenever you feel pain, just fix your mind there. We call it using pain as an object for insight. Then say to yourself 'pain, pain' according to how you really feel. When your mind is concentrated you will find that the pain is relieved. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"You must be able to do it. Don't just think you can. You must firmly establish your mind to doing this. You must use mindfulness to relieve suffering, understand?"

"Yes, I do. Thank you, Luang Poh. If you have time, please come and visit me again. I don't think I will live much longer. At least you may help to send my consciousness to a happy state of existence," she said, as one who saw death as a completely normal.

"You don't need me to send your consciousness on. You can do it yourself. If you have practiced you know which way to go, and you know how to practice to get there."

"I know in theory, but in practice I still can't do it."

"That means that you do not really know. If you really knew, you could practice. Remember this. Today I have given you some reflections on many topics. If you can practice them, you will be able to relieve your suffering. I must say good-bye now."

Mr. Kum hastened to send the monk to his car, where Somchai had been waiting ever since the monk said it was time to leave. The monk spoke encouragingly to Kum:

"Have patience, Patron. Think of it as results of karma you two have

done together. Pun must have pleased you in the past, so now you must return the favor. Just pay your debt so that there will be no outstanding karma between you."

"Yes, Luang Poh. This life I was born to pay my debt to my wife and children. I will continue to serve my karma until I die, then next life I won't be born as 'old Kum.' I would like to be a monk like you so that I can cut off all this karma," he said, like one chastened with life.

"That's good. I give my blessings if that is the way you want it. May you have determination and chant the Dhamma often. If your determination is strong, it will be as you wish. I take my leave, now, good-bye."

"Yes, thank you so much, Luang Poh. Thank you for coming to prod my awareness and giving me the strength to continue fighting. May you reach Nibbana quickly." This was a blessing that the Phra Khru was particularly pleased to receive, even though he realized that attaining Nibbana quickly or slowly depended mainly on one's perseverance.

As the car moved away, Somchai said, "Luang Poh, you sat talking for so long, couldn't you smell the stench? Even though I was sitting further away, it made me feel sick."

The Phra Khru did not answer, but said instead, "Did you see their daughter? The one driving the BMW? She was so ugly."

"Ugly! I thought she was beautiful! It's a pity I was born too late, if not then I would have courted her. She's got everything, beauty, money and intelligence."

"You only see the outside, the superficial value, but what's inside you do not see."

"But it's not necessary to see the inside, Luang Poh!"

"Sure it is, Somchai. Why isn't it necessary? It's because people think like you that they find no happiness in marriage, they only see the outside."

"I won't argue with you, Luang Poh, I feel a headache coming on. Today I've met with such heavy matters. Why is it we have met with such heavy matters today? Thursday is the day I was born."

"All right, then, since you have met with such heavy matters all day, listen to another serious story, then you won't have to carry such a heavy burden in the future. Do you know that I saw the karmic retribution in store for that woman with the BMW? In the future she will be paralyzed like her mother, and her daughter won't come to minister to her needs, either. And her case will be even worse, because her husband will leave her to find a new wife. He won't come to look after her like her father looks

after her mother.”

“Is that why you pressed her to wash her mother’s clothes? You wanted to help her, but she did not reciprocate your good intentions. It’s such a shame. Even if I were her age, I would not court her. I couldn’t stand washing her soiled clothes, the stink!” Somchai feigned a feeling of revulsion.

“That’s why I said it was karma—karma that no-one can help. I have tried to no avail. It must be left to karma, as the Buddha said: *kammuna vattati loko*, ‘All creatures fare according to their karma.’”



Chapter 28

Somchai drove the Phra Khru into Wat Ambhavan at dusk. There were many cars in the parking lot—pick-up trucks, vans, sedans, and motorcycles—indicating that a lot of people had come to seek him out with matters that could not wait till observance day. The monk was tired from the journey and would have liked to take a bath, but, feeling sorry for the people waiting, he went up to his dais.

“Luang Poh, would you not like to take a bath?” Somchai asked with concern. He himself felt so tired.

“Never mind, I feel the patrons have been waiting long enough. I don’t want to offend them.” Instead of the visitors being afraid of bothering the Abbot, he was afraid of offending them, and bore unpleasantness for their sakes. How many in this world would have such kindness? How many would endure suffering so that others might be happy?

“Patrons, have you eaten?” was the first question he asked. The topic of food must come first for householders.

“We have eaten already,” the men and women who sat in his lodging spoke in unison. In front of everyone there was a glass of tea. The Abbot was wondering who rendered them this service, since Somchai had gone with him. He asked, “Who has served you the tea?” He knew that the cooks would not have come to serve tea in the lodging.

“Your spiritual student who stays in this lodging. The tall, thin one. He was only here a minute ago arranging the queue. I don’t know where he has gone.”

The speaker looked around for the person who served the tea. The Phra Khru was curious, so he used his heightened perception and saw that the man who came with the stone was the one who received the visitors. His kindness was not surprising to the monk because the same kind of

thing had happened only last year.

At that time some female government officials, from the Department of Funds, had come to inspect work in the province. They decided to stay for a night at Wat Ambhavan. It just happened that someone invited the Abbot to give a lecture on Dhamma in Bangkok, and all the cooks had left to watch a 'ligae' performance. There was no-one to receive the guests. Mae Kalong had to take on the responsibility of serving them food and drink. And when they had finished she led them to their resting places.

It was in the morning that he found out that there were government officials staying at the temple. He asked how they managed to find food and places to sleep, as the people who usually took care of those duties had gone to watch the ligae. The officials replied that the beautiful young spiritual student of Luang Poh had received them and had made a very delicious vegetable salad and curry. She topped it off with a serving of hot coffee for each of them, then led all of them to their lodgings.

The Phra Khru assembled all the cooks so that they could point out who the person was. They said that she was not elderly, like these women, but young and beautiful. Then the cooks said it was probably Mae Kalong. The officials then asked him who Mae Kalong was, so he was obliged to tell them her story. They were so afraid they left the temple and went to stay in a hotel in town.

The first of the visitors crawled forward on hands and knees. He paid obeisance three times, then reported, "Luang Poh, I have brought food for the kitchen: one sack of rice, and dried fish, salted fish, chilies, onions, and garlic. Would you please pour the water of dedication and send the merit to my wife's sister? She's appeared in my dream saying she's been starving. She told me to bring things to donate to the canteen at Wat Ambhavan and then to ask you to pour the water of dedication to her. She has never entered a temple. How she came to know about Luang Poh I don't know."

"How long ago did she tell you this?" the Phra Khru asked.

"Many nights ago. My wife and I kept forgetting. She has appeared to me three times now."

"Has she been dead long? What did she die of?"

"She died about a year ago, I think—of a fever."

"How old was she when she died?"

"Twenty-three. She had just finished college and had been working for only one year. Why was she so short-lived, Luang Poh? I was surprised. She led a good life, but suddenly she was dead. She was my wife's youngest sister. We took pity on her when she was orphaned and we raised her

like a daughter. At the time my wife and I still had no children. She was a very good student. She was the first in the province when she finished the third year secondary school level. Then she went to enter a preparatory school, and after that she was admitted into the Science Faculty at Chulalongkorn University. She finished with second class honors. Then she started work at the Department of Science last year. Then she came down with a fever, just an ordinary flu. She shouldn't have died," said the man who had been both father and brother-in-law of the deceased.

"And what was her character like?"

"She was a good girl. She was very obedient. If there was a flaw, there was only one—she did not like to make merit. But then, after she died, how did she know about Wat Ambhavan, and you too? That really puzzles me."

"Have you got a picture of her? What did she look like?"

"Yes, my wife just happened to bring her picture along. Here it is." As he was speaking he held out a three inch snap shot for the Phra Khru. The monk received the picture and looked at it for a while, setting his mind to "perceiving," until he clearly saw the karmic lot of the dead girl. Then he announced, "She ran out of fuel."

"What do you mean, Luang Poh?" The man looked bewildered.

"It means the good karma she had accumulated was exhausted. She had a good life because of her past good karma. But in this life she stopped making it, she didn't make any more merit. That is, she didn't replenish her fuel. The old fuel was all spent. Now that she's starving, she realizes her karma. So she has wandered here to Wat Ambhavan. Never mind, I will settle this matter for you." The monk took this chance to give a teaching to the persons sitting there:

"Patrons, listen to this. Good and bad karma really do exist. The mind also really exists, as does the circle of life. Take this girl for example: while she was alive, she did not believe in these things. Even though she was clever, and good with books, it was worldly wisdom, which can be only be used while you are alive. After death, worldly knowledge cannot help you. Therefore, if you want to have good fortune in the next life, you must collect goodness. Only merit can follow you to the next life. You can't take any possessions with you."

"I think I must take my leave, Luang Poh. I have been here since early this morning, afraid that I would not meet you." The man was in his forties. He paid his respects with the threefold obeisance and left.

The second case was just moving forward on hands and knees when a man in his fifties hurried into the lodging, and spoke heatedly, "Luang Poh,

help me. My mother! My mother!"

"Hey, rich man, it's my turn. Don't get out of line," the second complainant, a plump, pale-skinned woman, interjected.

"I am sorry. My mother is dying. Luang Poh, please go and help her." The last sentence he spoke to the Phra Khru. He looked impatient and pitiful at the same time.

"How do you want me to help, merchant, I am not a doctor," he said, excusing himself.

"Yes, yes, Luang Poh, you can help. You are not a doctor, but you can save her from dying, and then I will make merit with you for twenty thousand baht." Giving bribes was a habit with him. Many of the people sitting there were repulsed by his behavior. Not only was he jumping the line, he was insulting the venerable owner of the lodging.

"Now, if I could help, nobody would be dead—and I would be very rich," said the Phra Khru. Then he began explaining, "I cannot stop death. Where I can be of help is to show the dead the way to a good bourn. This is all I can do." The monk did not add that even if he did tell, if people didn't listen he could be of no help at all.

"Then you can go and help show her the way. You can go now. I have brought a car to take you."

"I cannot go right now, merchant. You had better go home. Tomorrow I will go. Can't you see that my lodging is full of guests?"

"If she dies first, who will show her the way?"

"Don't worry, she won't die. She'll wait for me to show her the way. I guarantee it. If she dies, you can fine me. I will give you the whole temple," he said jokingly. Hearing this, the merchant felt a bit better. If the Phra Khru said his mother wouldn't die, he believed him. Since the time he had offered himself as a spiritual student he had not once seen him say anything but the truth. The merchant paid obeisance many times, got up and left, making a point of thanking the plump pale-skinned lady that had allowed him to speak out of turn.

"Luang Poh, my daughter has a housewarming ceremony on the 24th I would like to invite you to the ceremony," said Jey Muay. She came to the temple often, and was well acquainted with the venerable monk.

"I cannot go, patron. The 24th is an observance day. I do not leave the monastery on observance days. I must stay and receive visitors."

"In that case, could you advise me as to who should perform the rites and see whether the day is auspicious or not?"

"True Buddhists shouldn't be superstitious, you know. If we do good,

every day is good. On the other hand, if we do evil, everyday will be evil. But if you cannot cut off your attachment to superstition, I would like to advise you that Thursday is an auspicious day. This is my personal opinion, mind you. I believe that Thursday is a good day because it's our Parents' Day."

"Thursday is Teachers' Day, isn't it, Luang Poh?" a lady countered, "They always hold ceremonies to pay respect to teachers on Thursday."

"And aren't our parents teachers? They are our first teachers, I assure you. Who are the greatest teachers of sons and daughters? Our parents." The monk then turned to speak to Jey Muay, "Remember that, Mrs. Muay. If you want to hold any day as auspicious, make it Thursday. Don't believe the fortune-tellers who say it is the day of great catastrophe or victory or whatever. If you respect your parents as teachers, you must hold Thursday as an auspicious day. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, Luang Poh. I will tell them to change it to Thursday, three days later. Can you go then?"

"Wait a minute, let me look in my notebook." The monk took a notebook from his satchel and leafed through it.

"I am sorry. On Thursday a General and his Lady will bring their nephew to ordain as a novice here. Never mind, I do not have to go. Wait a minute, I will tell you how to do it."

"Then can you recommend a monk to invite in your place, in order to anoint the house's door."

"You don't have to find an 'external monk' to anoint the house's door. The 'internal monk' can do that. Do you know the 'internal monk'?"

"No, I do not. You're not referring to a Buddha statue, are you?"

"No, not a Buddha statue, a real, live monk."

"But my daughter's house has no monks."

"Yes, she does. Why doesn't she? You yourself are her 'monk.' You can anoint the door, or you can ask your husband to anoint it. The parents are the greatest boon for their children."

"I don't think we can do that, Luang Poh, because her father died a long time ago, and I do not know how to anoint."

"What's so difficult? You just put your finger in the powder and then touch the door. You can say at the same time, 'rich, rich,'—or say it in Chinese, 'seng lee hor, seng lee hor.'" He waved his finger through the air in demonstration, saying "rich, rich, seng lee hor, seng lee hor." Everyone laughed, then he said,

"It's so easy. Can you do it? Wait a minute, I will give you some pow-

der for anointing. It has already been blessed." Although he didn't like incantations, with some kinds of people he felt it was a useful boost for the heart.

"Yes, I can do it, but I do not know if my daughter will allow me to." Jey Muay was still worried.

"She must. Tell her the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan has ordered it. If she wants to be rich, she must allow her mother to anoint the door."

"Thank you so much, Luang Poh. In that case I will have to ask you for the powder, then I won't have to bother you again." The Phra Khru called Somchai, who had already taken his bath, to go up and fetch the powder for him.

The third case was a wealthy millionaire couple from Bangkok. The husband had a gold watch set with diamonds. His finger sported a large diamond which shone brilliantly. On his neck he had a gold necklace weighing a good few ounces. For her part, the wife wore gold and jewelry all over her body. Almost every finger had a diamond or jewel on it.

"Luang Poh, I would like to ask permission to talk to you in private. Would it be possible to go upstairs?" the husband asked.

"You want it to be private? Then the other people will have to wait a while. It won't take much time, will it?" he asked the millionaire.

"Maybe about ten minutes, Luang Poh."

The venerable monk got up and led both people to the upstairs floor of his lodging, closed the door and bolted it. Then he allowed the millionaire to come out with his 'business.'

"Luang Poh, my eldest son, whom I have sent to America, is a drug addict. What can I do? I would like him to be ordained with you, learn meditation and stop his habit. Would you permit that, sir?"

"I don't think so. It's true that the practice of meditation has many benefits, but that doesn't mean everyone can practice it. It depends on each person's accumulated merits or spiritual perfection. From my experience there are two kinds of people who cannot practice meditation: those who are mentally ill, and drug addicts."

"That means you won't help our son? Please help us. We have lots of money. If you help us, we could help build anything you want for this temple. We will do everything we can. I ask only one thing—that you help our child."

The wife of the wealthy man spoke with trembling voice. In spite of such beautiful ornaments on her body, her face was sad with misery—the misery of a mother who knows that her son is in great danger. The misery

that even a hundred or a thousand million baht could not assuage.

"Please don't get me wrong. It's not that I don't want to help. I would like to help you in any way I can, but when it comes to drugs, I cannot help you. People have brought their children to me to cure. I tell them straight out that a drug addict cannot give up his habit no matter what level of meditation he reaches. To tell you the truth, the matter of levels of meditation doesn't come into it because they can't even reach the first level, their minds are so distracted," he explained.

"Then what can we do, Luang Poh? I have spent millions on having him cured, but when he leaves the hospital he goes straight back to the habit again."

"I think you must make a resolution. Think of it as his karma. If he was physically sick, a doctor could cure it. But no doctor can help karma diseases. It has to be left to his own karma. Try to make your minds detached so as to reduce the suffering," the monk consoled them.

"Luang Poh, what karma has my son done? Why has he become this way? Could you check, please? If we knew, maybe my wife and I would find it easier to be detached."

"For most people I would not check, because I want them to check it for themselves, see it for themselves. But since you have asked, I will check it out for you." Using his 'perceiving', he clearly saw the karmic influences of the people in this family: the addiction of this millionaire's son was a prime example of "the workings of karma." The millionaire sitting before him had built his wealth from selling drugs—he was a dealer who exported drugs from Thailand to the United States. The results of this karma were affecting him through his own son. He had made other people addicted, and now his own son was receiving the results of that karma. It was a classic example of the workings of karma.

"Patron, the story is very bad, much worse than I expected. I don't know if you will allow me to talk about it or not. It is your best kept secret. I think I'd better not tell. You tell me, what profession are you in?"

"I'm in trade."

"What kind of trade, could you name the goods that produce for you a hundred or a thousand million? Please tell me."

"Er ... it's textiles. I have a factory manufacturing ready-made clothes to sell abroad," said the millionaire, avoiding the truth.

"But that is not what I have seen. The matter of clothes is only a front to show that you have a profession. But the thing that made your billions is not clothes. All right, if you don't want to tell me, that's okay. But know

that, if you do not give it up, karma will follow your other three children who are learning in Bangkok. They will be next to become addicted to drugs, like their elder brother."

Then the millionaire's wife cried out loudly, "Yes, Luang Poh, he deals in drugs!"

"Kim Eng!" the husband shouted. Shedding copious tears, the wife turned to him, "Confess to him. Maybe the venerable can help us. Do you want to see our child die miserably?" His wife's words made the millionaire downcast. He didn't want his wife to reveal the secret, but then he didn't want to destroy his children's futures. And what he was most afraid of was being murdered to keep his mouth shut. He had seen that kind of killing before, and it wasn't a pretty sight.

"You do not have to worry about me revealing your secret. I know that this matter is a dangerous one for both of you, and me too. There is no reason at all for me to let other people know about it. Not only would it serve no purpose, it would be harmful. This is a grave issue. It is beyond my power to correct things. Anyone who gets caught in this trade must have bad karma. Would you like to stop or not? I have a way to help."

"I can't give it up, Luang Poh. If I do, I will surely die. They wouldn't let me walk out on the streets alive."

"Answer me first whether you would like to stop or not. I guarantee that I can help you."

"Yes, I would like to stop. But it is impossible. I can't see any way."

"All right, if you intend to stop, just believe me. All of you must come to make merit here. The whole household should come. That is, bring your three sons here. But the eldest one cannot be helped, you will have to let him go."

"Come here to help build the temple? I would be willing to. How much do you want, a hundred thousand or a million? We'll give you anything," Kim Eng hastily volunteered.

"That won't be necessary. On the material side, this temple has enough. For building this merit I don't think you need to spend any money. Just come here and I will show you the way. You must hurry though, or else it will be too late."

"Yes, we will come again tomorrow. We must say good-bye for now. Tomorrow we will come again."

The husband and wife left with hope in their hearts. They had only realized at that instant that millions or billions could not help relieve a troubled mind.

By the time the last guest took leave, it was past midnight. At a time when most householders were asleep, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was taking his bath. Then he went up to his room on the top floor of the lodging, where he continued writing his book about gauging meditators' mental states for another two hours, until two o'clock in the morning. Then he went to sleep. While most other people slept from six to ten hours, the Phra Khru rested for only two hours at the most.



Chapter 29

The next day, after the meal, the Phra Khru set out to visit the merchant Bua Heng's mother in Amphur Tha Wung, Lopburi Province. Bua Heng led him into his mother's room, which was crowded with her sons and nephews. Seeing him coming, they looked as happy as if a deva had come to save them.

"Luang Poh, help us," Bua Heng's wife implored him. "Help her to talk to her sons and nephews. She hasn't spoken for three days."

"Well, she's almost gone, what do you expect her to say? Why should she talk anyway?" the monk responded.

"She must, Luang Poh, because she hasn't made her will yet. She hasn't told us who she will give her property to, who will get how much. And then there's the money in the bank—who will get that?" droned the sick woman's daughter-in-law.

Looking at the sick woman, the Phra Khru knew that she could talk, and that he could make her talk.

"It's true, Luang Poh. Mother hasn't divided her fortune for us. If she dies now, the brothers will quarrel over her estate." This was the second son, a teacher. He agreed with his older sister-in-law.

Feeling sorry for the dying woman, the visitor said, "Oh, I thought you were worried about the sick woman. You're only worried about the fortune."

"Gee, Luang Poh, money matters don't take sides with anybody. Sure we are worried about our mother, but we have to think about ourselves. If mother dies, I will be the one to suffer the most, because I don't have a job yet. I haven't finished my studies." This was the youngest daughter. The small children, nephews and nieces, oblivious to what was going on, ran around boisterously.

The Phra Khru looked at the sick woman again. A worm about a centimeter long was crawling out from under the blanket. She was not dead, yet why these worms? He told Bua Heng to lift the blanket up and look inside.

"How terrible, merchant. How could you let these worms infest your mother like this," he said reproachfully. Worms were crawling all over the poor woman's body.

"We don't know where they come from, Luang Poh, but we have picked off many and thrown them away," the son, the teacher, spoke.

"They're coming out of the sore in her back," Bua Heng said. At the same time he turned his mother on to her side. It was as he had said: at her waist was a deep, infectious wound that penetrated to the bone. Worms were all over it, sucking on the blood and pus. The sick woman's state now was no different from a breathing corpse.

Wanting to know how things had gotten this way, the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan used his 'perceiving' and clearly saw the karma of Mrs. Kim Hong.

Kim Hong had collected a lot of bad karma from the time she was a young woman until she reached old age. It had become her regular habit (*acinna kamma*). Her profession of trading and money-lending had given her many opportunities to build evil karma by cheating customers and debtors, until she had built her fortune—only to have her sons and nephews fight over it while she was dying.

"All right, if you'd like the sick woman to talk, I'd like everyone to leave the room. Wait until I call, then you can come in." The sons and nephews hesitated a little. Finally they all went out voluntarily. "Would you please call my driver in here too?" He did not want to stay alone with a woman in a secret place, even if she was older than him and in a state near death.

"Somchai, lock the door, will you?" he instructed his student, to prevent eavesdropping.

"Ah Sim, I know that you can talk, but you won't because you are angry at your sons and nephews for fighting over your fortune in front of you. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right, Luang Poh. I am angry and I hate all of them," the old woman rasped. Only he could hear it clearly, with the aid of his heightened perception.

"Sim, if you are angry and hate them, you won't be leaving in a good state. Since you are going, you must clear your mind and settle everything

properly. Do you know that you have collected a lot of bad karma? I can see all of it, so I'd like to help you come to your senses. Would you like me to help you?" he asked. Even though he felt heavy-hearted at her conduct, within that feeling there was compassion. He must help her, regardless of whether she was good or evil.

"I would," Kim Hong answered in her throat.

"If you want to, you must beg for forgiveness from those you have wronged. Can you remember them?" the monk asked, radiating kindness to her. Kim Hong felt her strength coming back. Her blocked mind began to clear. She thought of all her wrongdoings. Images of the events and stories flowed into her consciousness like a movie played at high speed. They began with an image of a small child, aged eight, clutching hundred baht bills to buy things at her shop.

"Sim, I would like to buy three liters of sticky rice, two hands of bananas, two kilos of ground coconut, and half a kilo of sugar," said the little girl, reading from the list her mother had jotted down. Kim Hong set the things according to the list and gave her the change. However, it just happened that the little girl couldn't carry all the things home, so she asked to leave the sticky rice there and carry the rest of the things home first.

As soon as the girl left the store, Kim Hong snatched the bag of sticky rice and poured it back into the sack. Some time later, the little girl came back to get it.

"Ah Sim, I have come for the sticky rice I left here."

"What rice? I don't know anything about it. Nobody has left any rice here," she said sternly. No matter how much the little girl pleaded, she feigned ignorance. The little girl went back home and told her mother. The woman came to the shop, holding a cane. When Kim Hong told her she didn't know anything about any sticky rice left there by the child, the woman thought her daughter had stolen the money, so she caned her many times, until her body was covered with welts. Then she bought three kilos of sticky rice again—the rice that Kim Hong had poured back into the sack.

After the image of the incident with the little girl came one of her weighing the farmers' produce with rigged scales. She did this by using her foot to prop up the bottom of the bamboo crates while she measured their produce with the long scale. By doing this, she was able to cheat the weight of the produce at least three to five kilos a crate. In one day she would weigh at least ten crates, which meant that she was able to "steal" thirty to fifty kilograms of produce a day.

Following the incident of the fixed scales was her cheating on her debt-

ors' interest with false documents. Countless were the ways she had cheated. It was probably because of such wickedness that the worms were eating at her even before she died. Then there was the problem of her sons and nephews, who she just now realized didn't love or care for her. They had only cared about themselves all along. This thought only increased her fury at her relatives.

Miserably, she told the Phra Khru, "Luang Poh, I want to give my fortune to you. You take it all, I offer it to you."

"No, that cannot be, Kim Hong. I cannot take it because it is not clean. You obtained it dishonestly. If you want to gain merit, you must distribute it to your sons and nephews fairly, that's all. When they come in, you tell them what you will give. I will be your witness."

"I want to give it back. Return it to those I have cheated," she said, thinking about her past actions.

"You don't have to do that. It's too much trouble. I am going to teach you how to ask for forgiveness, and then you must teach your sons and nephews to stop cheating in their work, help each other, make merits and dedicate the merits to you. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I can, Luang Poh. Call them in. I want to leave this world." It sounded like Kim Hong would like to get rid of her body as quickly as possible.

"Somchai, open the door and call them in," he told his student.

When they came into the room, they were surprised to find the sick woman talking so fluently. The power of Venerable Phra Khru's goodwill, together with her own will power, had made Kim Hong forget her suffering for a while. She arranged the division of her fortune to her sons and nephews, and taught them to work honestly.

"If you do what I did, you will be eaten by worms even before you die, and then you will know the suffering of hell." When she had finished speaking, she closed her eyes. The pain and weariness returned. She tried to think of the Phra Khru's face as she took her dying breath.

"Mother!"

"Ah Ma," the voices of her children and grandchildren cried out loudly together. It was only now that they had realized the worth of the dying woman. The Phra Khru had to console them for quite some time before they could contain their sorrow.

"Now, now, she has gone now. My duty is finished, so I will take your leave. Just arrange for the body in the usual way. Most important, do not forget to make merits in the name of the dead: then she won't have to suffer

too long." Having said this, he bade them farewell. He had to go into town to take part in a ceremony celebrating the conferment of a fan of rank on the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor, which was scheduled to begin at two in the afternoon.

"Luang Poh, if I had not seen it with my own eyes I wouldn't have believed it. Infested with worms even before she's dead! I still find it hard to believe, even though I did see it with my own eyes. Have I been dreaming, Luang Poh?" Somchai expressed his surprise, taking the chance to banter with the monk.

"This world is like a dream anyway, Somchai. Sometimes people can dream without falling asleep, like you for instance."

"What was I like, Luang Poh, a mango tree or a starfruit tree?" His student wanted to tease his teacher to reduce his stress. The image of the sick woman infested with worms lingering in his mind, not to mention the unmentionable stench, had made him feel ill.

"A yuan's root," the Phra Khru answered.

"Then I am a relative of Elder Brother Buahyao, am I, Luang Poh? Elder Brother is yuan (Vietnamese)," the spiritual student continued bantering.

"Cut the gab and step on it or we won't be in time for the ceremony," he ordered.

"Shall I rev up to two hundred?"

"Where are you going to get the other twenty, they only gave you a hundred-and-eighty," he said, referring to the speedometer.

"I'll get it from you, Luang Poh. You can give it another twenty with your willpower. I bet it would be just like flying."

"No, no, I don't want to kill us. I still have a lot of work to do. If you are bored with life, you can die first. I give you permission."

"I don't dare die, then you would have no driver."

"You can still come and drive for me even after you are dead. That would be even better: then you wouldn't irritate me with so much talk. Stop talking now, I want to spread mercy to the hell beings." Then he closed his eyes, and his driver was forced to stop talking.

The celebration of the fan of rank for the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor was grandly arranged with the help of many of his students, which included teachers, police, soldiers, merchants and ordinary people.

When he got there, the Phra Khru entered the ceremonial tent which was laid with seats to welcome the monks. The seats were arranged according to seniority in age of ordination. The Phra Khru was assigned a

seat next to a venerable old Luang Ta. Next down from him was a monk who, although elderly, had less seniority in the monkhood because he had been ordained when he was already quite advanced in years.

There were ninety-nine monks invited to the ceremony. Sitting in a line, they filled the place with a yellow glow. There were more than ten large tents erected for those who attended the ceremony to listen to the monks chanting.

With only one more minute before the monks would start chanting, a sudden whirlwind sprang up. It was so strong it lifted one of the nearby tents high up to the top of a tree, and one of the tent poles, a long steel rod, came loose and flew at the Phra Khru, striking him half in the mouth, half in the nose. The blood flowed profusely, to the consternation and bewilderment of the monks and the lay people who saw the incident.

The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan experienced excruciating pain. He pulled himself together and noted, "pain, pain" with well-trained mindfulness. The pain was so great he imagined that if the victim was either the Luang Ta on his left or the Luang Poh on his right, he would have died.

He set his mind on noting "pain, pain" until his mind became still and he was able to control the pain. In that instant the workings of karma manifested clearly in his mind's eye.

He saw himself sweeping a temple grounds and finding a log lying there. He picked it up and threw it under a cork tree, without noticing the dog that was sleeping there. The log hit the dog on the mouth and nose, making it bleed profusely. The dog yelped with pain.

He had to boil medical herbs and feed it for many days before the wound healed. Just think! Even though he had practiced mindfulness for so long, he could still make mistakes. He was remiss for only a second, yet he received such bad repercussions. Even unintentional karma could produce such results—what about karma with intention? Would he not have to suffer a hundred or a thousand times more than this?

When he realized what was happening, the people around him were making a great to do. Luckily there was a military doctor who had come to the ceremony. He dressed the wound quickly and expertly, surprised that the venerable wasn't hurt more. If this had happened to someone else, they would have to go to hospital and the wound would have taken many days to heal. The Luang Ta and Luang Poh who sat beside him were whispering to one another, "If that was us, we would have gone to our old home."

When the monks had finished chanting, their followers began celebrating wildly with the dance of the long drums. The Phra Khru was wonder-

ing where Somchai had gone, as it was almost time to leave, so he used his perceiving and saw his driver standing right in the center of the long drum dancers.

The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was struck to see one of the women dancers, who was strangely different from the others. Above her head was a big swarm of blow flies. He inclined his mind to considering what the reason was, and saw her karma clearly. This woman had great vices. Of all the five precepts, she could not keep even one. He noticed further that her face was like someone near to death, in spite of having been made up prettily and her wearing brightly colored clothes. There was the sign of death about her.

Suddenly she stopped dancing and fell to the ground. The long drum dancers stopped, and they helped carry her to a mat. Then the most extraordinary thing happened. Worms the size of rice grains began crawling profusely from her mouth, nose, rectum and genital organ. Her body became instantly fetid, giving off a stench that carried up to where he was sitting. People were whispering to each other and talking about it noisily. Today he had seen two people infested with worms.

As soon as the Phra Khru stepped into the car, Somchai started talking animatedly. He did not know that what he had seen, the venerable had also seen—but in a more profound way. He had seen the woman's karma.

"Luang Poh, I would like to designate today 'worms day.' Would you believe it? One of the women who was dancing to the long drums keeled over and worms crawled out of her. They said this woman was very sinful. She didn't abide by even one of the five precepts: killing animals, stealing, having lovers, lying and drinking. As soon as she died, she stank. The smell followed me here." The speaker snorted through his nose.

"Somchai," the Phra Khru called his student.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"You don't have to say anything. I already know what you saw, and also a few things you did not see. You really are a worthless fellow."

"Aw, Luang Poh, why do you scold me?"

"Why shouldn't I scold you? All you wanted to look at was the long drum dance. I almost died and you knew nothing about it. Doesn't that deserve a scolding?"

"What happened, Luang Poh?" he asked with alarm. Then the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan related the incident of the long steel post hitting him in the face, and concluded:

"You call today 'worms day,' but I would like to call it 'the day of the

dog's redemption." And then he chuckled.

"It's good, then, Luang Poh. You should pay your debts and end karma so you won't be born again. You did say that you would not like to be born again, didn't you?"

"I did say that. But whether it turns out like that, I don't know. It's worth thinking about, Somchai. Out of hundreds, thousands, of people it hit me alone, and exactly on the right place, too."

"When I get back, I think I will have to eat fifty tablets of aspirin," Somchai said, like someone thoroughly fed up with the world.

"Make it a hundred," the Phra Khru said facetiously.

"Why a hundred, sir?" asked Somchai suspiciously.

"So you would be dead on the spot without wasting time to send you to hospital."

"Luang Poh, I am only kidding. No matter how depressed with this world I am, I still don't want to die. I want to live even in this depressing world."

"People always say they do not want to die, but I have seen a lot to the contrary. Look at that woman who was dancing to the long drums. Would you say she'd like to die?"

"I don't think so, sir, but she's dead now, and infested with worms to boot. I'm getting afraid of bad karma now, Luang Poh. I wouldn't like to be infested with worms like those two women." He made a face.

"Good. You are close to me. If you were not afraid of bad karma, I would lose my reputation. People would say that you are 'near salt, but eating plain'."

"But I don't want to eat anything." In spite of being bored with the world, he still had a playful mood.

"In that case, don't." The ensuing silence was not long lived, then the fed up man started talking again.

"People's lives are so uncertain. You may want to die, but when you do die there is no warning."

"In that case, you must practice mindfulness. If your mindfulness is good, you will not have to worry wherever or whenever you die, you will not have to suffer. Mindfulness doesn't just mean being sane, it means being aware of oneself at all times." He felt obliged to enlarge on the subject, otherwise his driver would get his chance to speak further nonsense

"I saw a good example today. It reminds me of a poem by King Rama the Fifth. I would like to recite it to you. The speaker tried to put on his best voice:

We meet in the early morning, lie dead late morning.
We are happy in the late morning, die by afternoon.
We dance happily in the afternoon, by evening in coffin laid.
Teasing our children in the evening, at night gone forever.”



Chapter 30

Somchai drove the Phra Khru home to Wat Ambhavan a little after five o'clock in the afternoon. At his lodging, Phra Buahyao was teaching meditation to the millionaire and his family, as his teacher had instructed him.

When he entered, the single monk and the group of five lay people paid obeisance with the five point prostration.

"Blessings. Have you been here a long time?" he asked the millionaire.

"I arrived around two o'clock. We spent time buying white clothes, sir," the millionaire answered. He was dressed in a white round collar polo shirt and trousers of the same color. His wife and the other three children were dressed in clean, white clothes.

"Luang Poh, you must be tired from your journey. Please, wouldn't it be better to refresh yourself first, sir?" Kim Eng said as the monk took his seat. Today she wore no cosmetics or adornments, so her appearance was much different from yesterday, almost like a different person.

"I also would rather you refreshed yourself first," Kim Eng's husband added.

"That's all right. It's not important. I take a bath at two o'clock in the morning."

"That must be very cold? Do you have a hot water system?" the youngest son asked.

"No, the cold I must bear," the monk answered.

"And aren't you hungry? You haven't eaten dinner, have you?" the youth asked again. He was beginning to feel hungry himself as it was nearly dinner time.

"I am not hungry, son. I've gotten used to it. You asked because you

are hungry, right?" he asked, reading the young man's mind.

"Yes, sir," the young man answered truthfully.

"You may be hungry but you must try to be patient. If you have a lot of patience, you will get used to it." The two brothers listening nearby felt disappointed at this. They had thought the monk would allow them to have dinner.

"Sir, could we just have a meal today and begin abstaining tomorrow?" the oldest son bargained.

"Isn't it better to practice today? If you keep on procrastinating, it's always tomorrow. You don't need to procrastinate to do good deeds, my boy."

"Sir, why do you have to go without food to do good deeds?" another boy asked up.

"Wait a minute. I don't yet know your names. How about telling me so I can call you correctly. Just your nicknames will be enough."

"This one is Tom, sir. He's the third son. The second one's Tor, and the small one is Ting. The oldest son, he's in America, he's called Ton, sir," Kim Eng answered on her sons' behalf. At the mention of her eldest son she couldn't help but cry. The three younger sons thought their mother was crying because she missed their elder brother.

"Cheer up, Kim Eng. What will be will be," the millionaire soothed her. He had resigned himself to the fact that his son was a drug addict. He did not want the other three sons to be like their brother. That was why he wanted to bring them to the monastery to practice insight meditation, even though the schools were not yet on holidays. The children readily agreed.

"Sir, you have not yet answered me why you have to abstain from food to do good," the young man asked again.

"Wait a minute. You answer me first. How many precepts are there in the teaching of Buddhism?"

"We don't know sir. We go to a Christian school, so we don't know anything about Buddhism."

"And can you chant, the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha? Have you ever chanted them?" the monk asked Tor.

"No, never. I have never chanted. Our teachers only teach how to pray to God."

"But didn't your parents teach you how to chant?"

The young man looked at his parents, afraid of offending them, before he answered, "No, never."

"Never mind. If that's the case, could you please answer for your sons?"

Could you tell me what are the precepts, the main teaching of Buddhism?" the monk asked the millionaire.

"I don't know sir," Kim Eng's husband answered without hesitation. The Phra Khru then asked, "What is your religion?"

"Buddhism, sir."

"And what do you know about Buddhism? Try give me two or three subjects."

"I do not know anything, sir," the millionaire confessed.

"It is like this then. This is the weak point of Buddhists. That is, you are only Bush-dhists, you don't know anything about the religion you worship. You do not even know how to chant. I do not blame your sons at all for the fact that they do not know how to chant, since you have never taught them," said the monk, accusing the parents.

"If that's the case then it is not my fault, sir. My father and mother never taught me either," said the millionaire, putting the blame on his parents who were now laid in the cemetery.

"Then if your father and mother were sitting here, they would say the same thing, right?" the monk retorted politely.

"Right sir," the millionaire accepted the truth.

"Then lets stop it. Whatever we say there's no end to it. Let's not always blame others for our bad deeds. We must accept the truth openly that the fault is with us, not with others. Do you agree with me?" he asked Kim Eng.

"I agree sir."

"And what about you. Do you agree with what I am saying?"

"I agree sir," the millionaire answered.

"You must agree. If you didn't, I would have to wake your mother and father up from the cemetery to be trained again. Right, boys?" the monk turned to nod at Kim Eng's sons. The three young men laughed together.

"Now, next then is the topic of chanting. Please remember that parents must be good examples for their children. If the parents have never chanted, the children can't be expected to. Nowadays at school they don't teach students to chant much. What they do teach I don't know. I mean the Buddhist schools. As for you young men, you can't chant but you can pray to God, because the teacher has taught you. This is not the children's fault. We must blame the grownups for not instilling good and correct things in their children. Adults are most like this. Now I think we understand each other better. From now on we will correct things. Right? We will learn how to chant. If you stay at this temple you must chant every day. Twice each

day. We call it morning chanting and evening chanting. Now we are going to talk about Buddhism's important principles. He then turned to speak to Phra Buahyao.

"Ajahn Buahyao has been listening long enough. Why don't you tell your students what the principle teaching of Buddhism consists of."

The young monk was elated to have a chance to talk, since listening made him feel sleepy. He assumed an important bearing so as to impress his students and began the introduction in the Pali language, followed by the translation:

*"Sabbapapassa akaranam
Kusalassupasampada
Sacittapariyodapanam
Etam buddhanasasanam
To abstain from all evil,
To cultivate good,
To purify one's mind
This is the teaching of the Buddhas."*

"That's correct. In brief it is refraining from doing bad, doing good and cleaning your mind. Now Luang Ta would like to answer the question that you've asked. Why is it necessary to go without dinner to do good, is that right?"

"That's right, sir."

"If that is so, would you like to tell Luang Ta what the essential teaching of Buddhism is, as Ajahn Buahyao just said?"

Phra Buahyao felt chuffed on hearing his name mentioned.

"I do not remember at all sir, Luang Poh. Phra Buahyao spoke too long and there was Pali language which I do not understand. But what you said I could understand and remember too." His student's answer quickly deflated Phra Buahyao's heart. The Phra Khru could understand his feelings, so he reminded him.

"That's not good at all. The heart that is inflated and deflated according to pleasurable and unpleasurable emotions cannot do. You must train your mind not to be moved by the events of the world. You need a lot more practice." Then he turned to speak to Tom.

"Your Ajahn has failed the exam. He was evaluated by you and he failed, so his heart is deflated."

"How did I evaluate him?" the young boy asked, puzzled.

"You said you understood what Luang Poh told you but not what Ajahn Buahyao told you, even though we said the same thing. That means

Ajahn Buahyao is not an efficient teacher. Do you understand?" the monk explained.

"That's not how I see it, sir, Luang Poh. Maybe I am not an efficient receiver. That's more like it. Ajahn teaches well but the students do not receive well enough." Phra Buahyao felt that this young man was clever; at least more clever than he. Then the clever boy added, "But when Ajahn Buahyao taught us to walk up and down and to sit for concentration, he taught very well, sir. Everyone of us understands." On hearing this Phra Buahyao wanted to feel 'inflated,' but he was afraid of offending his teacher, so he just set his mind to being 'indifferent,' even though he found it very difficult to do.

"Then would you tell Luang Poh what you understand and remember?"

"Stay away from evil, do good and clean the mind, sir," the young man said.

"That's right. You have a very good memory. Now I would like to explain further that the three principles you have mentioned are related. Before you can do good, you must be able to avoid doing evil. To abstain from evil is moral conduct. Doing good is concentration. When you have concentration, your mind will be clear and then wisdom arises. We can say in other words that the principle teaching of Buddhism is morality, concentration and wisdom. These three are related. You have to have good morals first. You can speak about good morals as either the five precepts or the eight precepts. These two kinds of precepts are for householders. They are not for the novices, monks or nuns."

"Is that the five precepts I used to learn in school, sir?" It seemed Ting, the youngest, remembered learning them.

"What did they say in the books?" the monk asked him in return.

"They said there are five precepts. The first one is not to kill animals sir."

"And the second?"

"I forget sir. I used to remember all the five near exam time, but right now I can't remember. Only one sir," the young man said truthfully.

"Oh, it's like that then. I thought people learned the rules of conduct for observing them, but it seems it's only for memorizing when the exam was near. Is that it?" Even though he was the youngest sitting there, Ting could see that the monk was being sarcastic, so he gave a justification to excuse himself.

"My friends were the same. They could memorize before the exam,

but when the exam was over, they forgot it all. Some even forgot before they took the exam and flunked the exam. We hated morality the most," the young man told it how he felt. It was a common feeling among the new generation, who sees religion as an old and foolish thing to be blindly followed.

"It's because of this that the Ministry of Education has decided to drop the subject of morality from the school curriculum, because they thought the students don't like it." He was being sarcastic again, this time his remark was aimed at the Ministry of Education. Even though he knew that the monk was being sarcastic, however, the young man pretended to agree, saying, "Good sir, it's good that they stopped teaching it. I don't think it can be of any use."

"If you think like that, why did you come to this temple?"

"My dad forced me to, sir."

"Then you came here because you were forced to, is that it?"

"Ting, watch your words. A foul mouth will lead to a sore nose," the millionaire warned his youngest son.

"But it's true, Dad. None of us wanted to come. And we missed out on celebrating New Year's Day, too. I don't know why we had to come." The millionaire took another glance at his son, so the youth kept his mouth shut.

Feeling sorry for their father, the Phra Khru said, "Now, don't you say bad things about your father. Let's see you practice for seven days. Then if you want to complain, you can. Anyhow, since you have been forced to come here, I would like to recommend you set your mind to the practice for seven days. Give it a try."

"Yes, sir," the boy agreed easily, though he still did not understand morality.

"Luang Poh, sir, I think the school should stop teaching morality because it's no use at all."

"Do you believe that? And what subjects do you think are useful?"

"Sciences, sir. These days we have the new technology which is the result of scientific progress."

"But morality teaches people to be human. The sciences teach people to be robots. Wait and see. In the future we will be more like robots, and lose our human side more and more."

Phra Buahyao felt a headache coming on as he listened. He couldn't stand any more, so he protested, "Luang Poh sir, I felt a headache coming on. What you've said is so heavy."

"If you have a headache you can go back to sleep," he said blandly.

"No, sir, I am not sleepy. If I went to sleep I would be like the saying."

"What saying?"

"The saying about the Abbots of the new age: 'In the morning reclining, sleeping at noon, in the evening resting, and at night going to sleep.'"

"Late at night eating noodles," the young man named Ting finished for him. All the people started to laugh, breaking the tense atmosphere somewhat.

"Now, who can tell me what the five precepts are?"

Parents and sons looked at each other because nobody could remember the five precepts. The Phra Khru turned to reprimand Phra Buahyao:

"How do you teach your students? Why, they don't even know the five precepts. When you began the meditation exercise, didn't you give them the precepts?"

"Yes, I did, sir," Phra Buahyao answered, as he had just given them the eight precepts.

"Ajahn Buahyao gave them in Pali language sir, Luang Poh, so we could not remember," Tor found an excuse for all of them.

"Then you can tell them in Thai. I want the five precepts first."

"I've forgotten it all sir, Luang Poh. Ting has just learnt it, and he has forgotten it already. I learnt a long time ago, if I remembered them it would be a miracle," Tor answered.

"Then let's not waste time. I will not waste time on other subjects, I will explain what the five precepts are." Then the monk proceeded to explain each of the five precepts until all five people understood them well. Then he explained the eight precepts, or Uposatha precepts, and summarized them all like this:

"You will see that the three last precepts that are added support the third precept. Abstaining from eating a meal in the evening prevents the mind from being preoccupied with the five sensual pleasures. Don't forget that breakfast helps feed the body, and lunch feeds work, but the evening meal helps to feed the five sensual pleasures! So if we practice meditation, we must abstain from eating the evening meal because it causes us to delight in form, sound, smell, taste, and the sense of touch. Is that understood?"

"Yes, I understand, sir," the millionaire answered.

"And what about your children? Do you understand what I have said," he asked the three young men.

"I understand also, sir, but not completely," Tom answered.

"If it's still not completely clear, that's all right. If you practice a lot, you will understand. I only ask for you to have perseverance. Now you can each separate to practice at your lodgings. Tomorrow you can come to let me test your progress."

Just before the five people got up, two men came in carrying a post about three meters in length into the lodging. A woman aged about fifty was holding a coconut-leafed broom.

"Have you brought the post for me to blow an incantation on?" the monk said as the two men put the post down in front of him, puffing hard.

"It's a strange story, sir, Luang Poh," the woman holding the broom said as she put it down and paid respects three times. On hearing of a strange story, the millionaire, his wife and sons decided not to leave.

"How is it strange? This temple always has strange stories coming in. I don't know if other temples are the same. What would Phra Buahyao say about this?" he turned to ask Phra Buahyao.

"I don't know what to say sir, Luang Poh, since I have never been to other temples. However, I still say this temple is stranger than others." The young monk answered as if he wanted those who listened to think something of it, but the Phra Khru did not like to think a lot, so he asked the woman:

"What's strange about it? Would you tell me?"

"Why isn't it strange, sir, Luang Poh? Does a post normally talk?" said the man carrying the post after he had recovered from exhaustion.

"Oh, what did it say?" he asked, not at all surprised.

"It told me it would like to come and stay at Wat Ambhavan, and that I should help bring it here. It said it would like to help sweep the temple, and to bring a broom along too. It was a woman's voice sir."

"And who else heard this?"

"I did, sir, I heard it say that three nights in a row," the woman confirmed.

"So I had to carry the whole post here and bought a new one in its place," the man, in his fifties, narrated. He was the woman's husband.

The Phra Khru set his mind on his perceiving and found a thin lady in black dress kneeling before him.

"I've come to help Luang Poh sweep the temple ground sir," she reported, for his ears alone.

However, the Phra Khru knew that she wanted to come to stay with the man who came with the stone, because they had been bound to each other in their last life. In fact, it was he who asked her to come to stay at the

temple to achieve perfection.

“If that’s the case then would you help carry it under the cork tree behind my lodging please,” he said to the two men. He didn’t want a woman to stay inside his lodging, even if she was just a ghost: the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was very strict in the monk’s discipline.



Chapter 31

On December 31, 1973, Duang Suda drove to Wat Ambhavan at the request of her parents. Merchant Seng and Kim Ngor wanted to listen to the monks' chanting of the First Sermon to see out the old year and begin the new. A sign that arose in their meditation had told them to come. The two had made so much progress in their meditation that they both saw the same sign.

After making their decision they voiced their plans to their daughter. It just so happened that the governor's driver had asked for leave to celebrate New Year's Day with his family, so the duty of driving fell with Duang Suda herself. It was a service she performed willingly.

A lot of people had come to the temple, ranging from children of eight or nine years to old people, most of them females. The men usually celebrated by getting drunk, so they never considered coming to the temple. All the cooks had to work extra hard because the guests were arriving in a constant stream. Those who came for meditation were less than those who came to listen to the sermon.

At eight in the evening, everyone gathered in the uposatha hall and performed the evening chanting together with the temple's monks. Then the abbot gave a one-hour sermon and the monks and householders performed meditation until eleven o'clock. After the meditation, they spread kindness to all creatures and asked forgiveness from those they had wronged. Near midnight the monks began chanting the auspicious chants and the First Sermon. The chanting continued until one o'clock of the new day. After that, monks and householders performed morning chanting together.

It was a new year celebration unlike any that Seng and Kim Ngor had ever experienced. The couple felt so pleased with the merits they made that

they forgot about sleep and made up their minds to come and celebrate New Year at Wat Ambhavan every year until their bodies would no longer permit.

The morning chanting finished at two o'clock. Both monks and householders went their separate ways to their lodgings. Those who were not sleepy continued to perform meditation. Those who could not endure the sleepiness slept for two hours and then got up to perform meditation practice at four o'clock. At eight o'clock in the morning of the first of January 1974, Duang Suda and her parents came to bid farewell to the Phra Khru before returning to Bangkok. When they arrived at his lodging, they saw many people waiting. The Phra Khru had not come down.

Suddenly there was pandemonium, shouting and the sound of glasses breaking. Curious to know what happened, Duang Suda heaved her plump body around to behind the lodging to the source of the noise. The picture that greeted her eyes made her gape. A woman about forty years old was throwing glasses at a man the same age. He ducked down wildly while the cooks tried to hold her back.

"Let me go," she shouted as she struggled. "I want to kill the bastard."

"Keep cool, madam, this is a temple. Aren't you at least afraid of offending the Phra Khru?" Boonrup cautioned her. The people sitting in the lodging filed outside to take a look. Khun Nai Duang Suda looked at the woman with pity. She strongly disapproved of the woman, who could not even control herself in a temple. Kim Eng, who had been waiting with her husband and sons for the Phra Khru to assess her meditation, had seen Duang Suda walking outside and decided to follow her.

"Kim Eng, don't go out, it's not our business," the millionaire told his wife. But her woman's curiosity had got the better of her, and she disobeyed her husband. When she went out, she just happened to meet eyes with the crazy woman, and so got caught up in her madness.

"What are you looking at? Watch out! Women who meddle with other people's affairs need a slap to teach them a lesson," the lady spat the words in Kim Eng's face. The millionaire's wife backed up inside, followed by the wife of the Provincial Governor, and came to sit beside her husband, thinking, "Abused on New Year's Day! What a curse!"

However, Duang Suda didn't actually sit down. Curious, she snuck around to the back door of the lodging. The woman had shaken her arms violently and freed herself of the cooks' grasp. She ran to fetch a log of wood and came straight for her husband, but he raced to the car, unlocked it and just made it to the driver's seat. The wife spat the foulest abuse she

could muster and struck the windshield with the log, smashing it. Then she tore the windshield wipers out, slashing her hand in the process. Her husband started the car. She ran to the front of it and blocked the way, screaming:

“Go ahead! Why don’t you knock me down and kill me!”

The husband sounded the car’s horn as a warning, but his wife wouldn’t budge. He stuck his head out the window and shouted, “If you don’t back off, I’ll ram you,” revving up the engine as he did so. If she didn’t back up, he would certainly ram her.

“Colonel don’t run her down! Don’t do it!” the cooks cried out loudly. One ran to stand beside the woman, thinking the driver would not dare to slam into her.

“Auntie, back off or I’ll run you down,” the man they called ‘Colonel’ shouted at her, and made as if he were going to drive off. The mad woman jumped onto the bonnet of the car. Someone spoke up.

“Auntie, tell madam to come down. If the Colonel starts off, she could fall down and break her neck.”

“Huh! ... Who would have the heart to kill his own wife? They have kids together. There they are standing over there!” the Auntie, Boonrup, pointed to a boy and a girl aged around seven standing with their nanny. Duang Suda looked over to the two trembling children, standing about six meters from her. Their little faces were covered in fear, and it seemed their little hearts would break at their parents’ actions. Duang Suda could not understand why two people could hurt their children so.

Then one cook, who was younger than the others, said to Boonrup again, “Quick, Auntie, bring the lady down. I believe the Colonel would dare to kill his wife. A man infatuated with his minor wife is capable of killing his major wife.”

“In that case, hurry up and help me. Quick!” she said to her friends as she dashed to the car. The man was about to drive off. The cook who had positioned herself in front of the car scampered out of the way, while the enraged woman standing on the hood adopted a squatting position, facing the driver. She pointed her fingers at him and lashed out abusive language, shrieking so loudly people’s ears were hurt. Boonrup ran to the side window and knocked on the driver’s side. Keeping a straight face, she lied, “Colonel, stop, Luang Poh is calling you.” The Colonel jammed on the brake, but he did not dare to step out of the car for fear of his wife.

“Madam, you may step down, Luang Poh has summoned you,” she told the deranged woman. She felt sorry for her—she knew her story well.

The Colonel had gone too far: he had dared to bring his minor wife to meet Luang Poh, knowing full well that he would meet his wife here, and his minor wife was none other than his wife's closest beloved friend. She had brought her here for meditation practice. She had eaten with her and slept with her in this temple. Then suddenly she turned out to be her husband's minor wife. If it had happened to Boonrup herself, she would have felt the same.

Hearing that Luang Poh had summoned her, madam Rasri came to her senses. She stopped cursing and throwing tantrums, carefully jumped down from the hood of the car, and walked lamely into the lodging.

Seeing his wife go into the Phra Khru's lodging Colonel Prawit suspected she might inform against him, so he figured it better follow her to explain to the monk himself. He didn't want the Phra Khru to hear only one side of the story. He stepped out of the car and followed behind his wife at a distance.

Madam Rasri entered the lodge and sat waiting for the Phra Khru in front of his seat, trying to keep as calm as possible. When she saw her husband's face, however, the hurt welled up again and she snatched a tea cup and threw it at his face. The porcelain cup struck his bald forehead, making it swell up instantly in a green color. The Colonel felt blood curdling on his face and rushed straight at his wife, slapping her repeatedly until the pale face turned left and right at the force of his slaps.

The people who had been waiting there raced to break the two apart, the men taking hold of the Colonel, while the women caught hold of Rasri. Phra Khru Charoen's quiet and peaceful lodging had been turned into a Chinese theater.

"Go and ask Luang Poh to come down quickly," the millionaire ordered Somchai, who was standing gaping. The youth ran up the lodging and excitedly reported to the Phra Khru.

"An emergency, Luang Poh. The Colonel and his wife are using your lodging for a boxing ring. Luang Poh, would you please come and act as referee? If not, madam Rasri will lose her reputation (*rasri*)." Even in an emergency, Somchai couldn't help making a joke.

"I can't Somchai. It's a matter between wife and husband. I don't dare meddle," he said calmly, neither excited nor pleased: his mind was still, unmoved by the situation no matter how bad it seemed.

"And what if they kill each other in your lodging? Wouldn't the story cause a scandal?" the young man voiced his concern.

"It's not as bad as that, Somchai. If they fight in my lodging or inside

Wat Ambhavan's temple compound, they won't die because there's something holy protecting them. But as soon as they go out of the temple, I know for certain that they will both die. The fate of these two people is cut off. If you do not want them to die," he said calmly, "go down and see that they do not get out of the temple's compound."

The apprentice had no choice but to go downstairs. When he opened the door, all were craning their necks, thinking it was the Phra Khru. The fighting had subsided.

"Luang Poh will come down in a minute," he announced. Upon hearing that Luang Poh would come down, Rasri stopped her wildness. Somchai arranged to find some medicine to dress the wound she incurred from the windshield wipers while the men found some ointment to rub into Colonel Prawit's swollen forehead. Duang Suda's heart beat wildly while the incident was in progress, but her parents were only slightly alarmed because of their practice of mindfulness.

A short while later, the Phra Khru opened the door. Everyone paid obeisance three times as the monk walked over to his seat. Colonel Prawit and his wife crouched in front of him, the latter sobbing intermittently.

"What's the problem? Why don't you talk it over, instead of using force?" he spoke softly, only wanting to be heard by three people.

"Luang Poh, sir, I can't stand it," sobbed Rasri. "He has hurt me so ... he has hurt me so much."

"And why do you allow him to hurt you? It's your heart, you shouldn't let anybody else hurt it. How did he hurt you? Can you tell me?"

"Er ... he brought his minor wife to meet you. He dared to ruin my reputation. Everyone in the temple knew that he was my husband. And then he just came here with that other woman," the woman said resentfully.

"What other woman? She's your friend, isn't she? I used to see her coming for meditation practice with you. And what's more, staying at the same lodging too."

"That's the reason. That's what hurts so much. My husband and my friend conspired to betray me," she said, sobbing intermittently.

"What about her betraying me, Luang Poh? When I went on a public service mission, she brought my driver to sleep with her in my bedroom."

Wanting to know the truth of the matter, the Phra Khru used 'his perceiving' to examine. His 'perceiving' told him that the Colonel was trying to malign his wife in order to get his sympathy for the wrong he had done. The officer had a sinful, crude and dirty mind. He behaved so badly even

with a monk he respected. It was such a pitiful story. If this man ever became powerful, he would do great damage to the country.

Rasri did not bother to correct his accusation. She knew well that the Phra Khru knew everything without needing her to explain.

"Luang Poh, sir, I felt so sorry for myself. I felt so fed up that I had chosen the wrong person. I am the one who is wrong. I do not know what karma I have done," she sobbed.

"Then choose again to correct the wrong. You've got the chance now. Your lover, my blasted driver," said the husband sarcastically. "I give him to you."

"Colonel," the Phra Khru called the man with waning patience. However, the monk could not help him, the man was completely blinded and could see no light at all. Sensing he could be of no help, he adopted an attitude of indifference: let it be according to the man's karma.

"Madam, I feel so sorry. I am sorry for you that even though you have come here to practice meditation many times, for days at a time, you have not been able to use your practice to solve life's problems. You have come here to practice mindfulness, but your behavior is like a person lacking sense. It shouldn't be so. Such conduct defames Wat Ambhavan." The Phra Khru had decided to teach Rasri, knowing that she could benefit from it.

Colonel Prawit was glowing, thinking that it served her right to be lectured as a New Year's gift. It seemed Luang Poh believed what he said. Little did he know that the Phra Khru would not teach those who 'could not receive,' and he would not say anything to hurt his feelings either. The man did not know that he had been categorized as 'an uncivilized animal'.

"Luang Poh, sir, please help me," the woman pleaded. "Help me to leave this state of suffering, please."

"I can only help to point out the way. Beyond this you must help yourself."

"I do not see any way at all sir, Luang Poh. Everywhere is darkness. I have no strength. I have lost my will to live."

"If you have lost it, you can build it back again to fight with life. I believe that you can do it. Go back and think. You are a teacher who has knowledge in both the worldly and the Dhamma sense: can't you solve such a little problem? I tell you briefly that if we make our mind strong, nobody can hurt our feelings; it is we alone who hurt ourselves. There now, go back and rest at your lodging. Your children are waiting for you, are they not? Talk to them to let them understand. They are yours. As to others, if they can't understand, you do not need to speak further. When a couple

separates they become strangers. Remember that, madam."

Rasri paid obeisance to the Phra Khru three times and then stepped out to find her children standing pale-faced with their nanny behind the lodging. Seeing their faces, she could not help crying. She knew then what she had to do. She would not let this kind of incident happen again. She would refrain from hurting her children and instead nurture them as best she could. She would be both father and mother to them, because she had just made up her mind to let her husband go.

After his wife left, Colonel Prawit got the chance to further 'defame' her:

"Very bad, Luang Poh. It's my karma to have such a wayward wife." The Phra Khru said nothing; he felt that Rasri should be saying this rather than her husband.

"Where is the person you came with this morning?" He ventured to ask about the other woman, the one Colonel Prawit was deeply infatuated with.

"I took her to stay at the nun's quarters. If not, Rasri would have caused trouble."

"Then Wat Ambhavan would be a real playground."

"Yes, sir," he laughed, "that would certainly be exciting." He saw it as fun. Utterly tired of the whole affair, the Phra Khru said to him, "Then bring her here. If Rasri sees her, there will be another incident."

The officer paid obeisance three times and stood up to go, but then spoke again.

"She may weep. She is a very weepy person, Luang Poh. But she is good at heart, very good. Rasri cannot compete with her."

"If she is so good why would she take another person's husband right before her eyes," the Phra Khru felt like saying, but he didn't because he saw no use in it, either for himself or the Colonel.

"Luang Poh, I don't dare come to practice meditation here again," Duang Suda spoke up after the officer was gone.

"What makes you say that?"

"I wouldn't like to be like Madam Rasri, sir, and I wouldn't like to be like her friend either. One comes to the temple only to make a scene and the other callously steals another person's husband."

"And it wasn't anybody else, was it, it was her own friend! How could she do such a thing," Kim Eng added, sending a friendly smile to Duang Suda.

"Kim Eng, it is not our business. Don't forget we are practicing medi-

tation," the millionaire censured his wife. Their three sons were sitting nodding sleepily.

"Oh, if you say that you defame Wat Ambhavan, and Phra Khru Charoen too. People will say that Phra Khru Charoen teaches his students to be odd," the Phra Khru said with a voice that could be heard all over the lodging.

"That's not true sir, Luang Poh," Seng objected. Both he and his wife practiced meditation regularly and strictly, so he understood truths which other people had not yet reached.

"I guarantee that meditation doesn't make people strange. That woman and her friend acted so strangely because they are not true meditators. They have not yet found the heart of meditation. I know that Luang Poh knows this better than I. Please explain so that others may understand," he pleaded with the Phra Khru. The owner of the lodging thus spoke up.

"Dear relatives and friends all: what the merchant says is entirely true. I confirm that meditation does not make people odd if they practice correctly and wholeheartedly. Please correct your understanding: the people who come to practice meditation are not people who have no impurities. If that were the case, there would be no need for them to come and practice. They come and practice so that their defilements will decrease and finally go away. If they do not attain any level of Dhamma, then they are still normal people just like anybody else, they still have love, greed, anger, and delusion. They can still be led into wrongdoing by defilements."

"Luang Poh, does Wat Ambhavan have people coming to celebrate New Year by fighting each other like this every year?" one man asked. He had just come to the temple for the first time at the invitation of a friend.

"No, this is the first time. I have to beg pardon from all of you for this pair's behavior. Whenever they go out of the temple both will surely die."

"Won't next year be like this? So that I can come to watch again."

"Surely not. This I guarantee. It is better that people come to fight in the temple. Anyway, it's better than the monks inside the temple fighting each other." The sound of laughter rang out. He repeated: "It's true, I'm not kidding. Not this temple, but one in Bangkok. Don't make me give any names, they will say I talked about them behind their backs. Just recently I went into Bangkok to meet with one Chao Khun. When I reached his temple I saw him scolding a junior monk. I don't know what he said to him, but the monk who was being scolded lashed out with his fist and hit him squarely on the nose. The Chao Khun was knocked out and fell face up on the floor."

“And what did that monk do? When he saw the Chao Khun knocked out, then what did he do?” the man asked.

“He didn’t have time to do anything. The other monks in the temple threw themselves on him, with fists and feet. They stomped him until he went unconscious. I just stood there stunned. At first I felt sorry for the Chao Khun, but later I felt sorry for the other monk. I raced back to Wat Ambhavan because I did not want to be a witness at the police station. After the monks in the temple beat him unconscious, they brought him to the police station saying he attacked the Chao Khun.”

“So you did not do your business with him?”

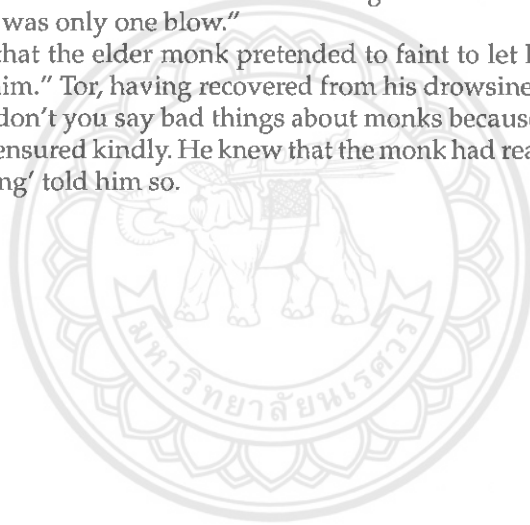
“How could I? They were having trouble, need you ask?”

“And did the Chao Khun die?” Kim Ngor asked.

“No, it was only one blow.”

“I say that the elder monk pretended to faint to let his subordinates avenge for him.” Tor, having recovered from his drowsiness, spoke up.

“Now don’t you say bad things about monks because it’s sinful,” the Phra Khru censured kindly. He knew that the monk had really fainted since his ‘perceiving’ told him so.



Chapter 32

The Phra Khru came down from his lodging at eight p.m. sharp to find the lay man and his family waiting for him. Tonight was to be the last night of interviewing, as tomorrow after the meal the family would be returning home.

"All right now, I will check the three children first, beginning with the smallest. Ting, isn't it?"

"Yes, Luang Poh, your memory is very good. I am pleased you remembered my name."

"How is your meditation? Is the rising and falling clear yet?"

"Yes, very clear."

"And when the sensation disappears, do you feel that clearly?"

"Yes, sir."

"How are you aware of it?"

"I am aware that it is gone." The answer was not meant to be cheeky, although it did sound that way.

"Does the feeling disappear on the rising or the falling?"

"I don't know, sir, because by the time I realize it, it's already gone."

"That shows your mindfulness is not yet clear enough. You must train your mindfulness to be faster than this. You must be able to notice whether the feeling disappears on the rising or the falling, do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Now that you understand, when you go back home you can continue to practice. Don't just sit and watch TV. If you continue your practice you will study better than before. You can learn whatever you like if you do not discard the practice. Remember my words well, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I want to study medicine. Do you think I will be successful?"

"If you really determine to, you must be successful. If you do not throw

out the practice of meditation, I guarantee that in the future you will be a doctor." The young Ting bowed down to the venerable old monk, beaming at the thought that he would surely attain his wish.

"And what about Tom, how was your practice?"

"I was really sleepy. I was even sleepy during the walking meditation. I've never been so sleepy in my life." The Phra Khru knew from this that the young man's practice had progressed considerably.

"And what did you do when you were so sleepy?"

"I laid down and went to sleep. But it was strange, as soon as I lay down, I couldn't sleep. I felt so bored, I can't explain it." The Phra Khru knew that his student had attained *nibbidañāna*, the eighth of the sixteen stages of insight. He had gone half way already.

"Your practice has really leapt ahead. Keep trying, you will be bound to succeed," the teacher said encouragingly.

"And what should I do about the sleepiness?"

"Your sleepiness is not ordinary sleepiness, it is a manifestation of gnosis. They call it *nibbidañāna*. I will tell you how to get rid of the sleepiness." From there, he instructed the meditator on what to do on reaching the eighth stage of gnosis, and then proceeded to interview Tor, Mrs. Kim Eng and her husband in that order. He concluded:

"Tom has gone further in the practice than anyone else, and you (meaning the father) have progressed the least."

"What level of gnosis did I achieve?" the father asked.

"The fifth level, *bhangañāna*. There are altogether sixteen stages of *ñāna*, the first is called *namarupaparicchedañāna*, the last is *paccavekkhanañāna*. Whoever reaches the last level is a Noble One of the first level, called a Stream Enterer."

"In that case, I have already gone halfway, is that right?" Tom asked excitedly.

"That's right, but the next half of the path is so difficult it'll make your eyes bleed. You will have to exercise the utmost effort if you want to walk the whole path, to cross over the ocean of birth and death."

"No matter how hard it is, I'm going to give it a try. Can I ordain here, please Father? I want to ordain for the rest of my life," Tom said, gushing with faith. Hearing his son say "ordain for the rest of my life," the man's heart skipped a beat. Like most people, he wanted to see his children grow in the worldly way more than the Dhamma Way. He turned to the Phra Khru:

"It's possible to get enlightened even without ordaining as a monk,

isn't it?"

"Yes, that's right, but ordaining will make the realization much faster than if one practiced as a layman."

When the Phra Khru had said this, the man turned to his son and said,

"In that case, Dad would like you to come back home first. Go home and think about it for many days first. If you are really determined, I won't prevent you, but right now I can't bring myself to allow it. What do you think, Luang Poh?"

"It's up to all of you to agree among yourselves. I am an outsider, I don't want to interfere in your affairs."

"Don't ordain, Tom, stay with us, at least for your mother's sake," said Kim Eng.

"Why, Mum? Why don't you want me to ordain?" the young man asked.

"Because I've already lost my eldest son, I don't want to lose another," the mother said, beginning to sob.

"Oh, has eldest brother ordained in America?" he asked, not knowing that his older brother was a drug addict.

"If only that were true, but ... " The mother burst out crying.

"Kim Eng, what are you saying?" her husband scolded her. He was afraid the other children would begin to wonder. It was imperative that they didn't know the truth.

"Did you spread thoughts of good will to your son after your meditation every time, as I instructed?"

"Yes, we did just as you said," Kim Eng answered.

"Me and my brothers did it too," Tor added.

"In that case there is nothing to worry about. I believe he will certainly improve," he said to the parents.

"Sadhu!" they said, raising their hands to their foreheads.

"Luang Poh, I must respectfully give you the highest thanks for allowing me and my family to experience a kind of happiness we had never known before—the happiness of peace, absence of confusion and trouble," the man spoke effusively. "And we didn't have to use any money to obtain it."

"Yes, you can't buy happiness like this for any amount of money, anywhere," Kim Eng said, wiping the tears from her white face with a handkerchief. "It is a great good fortune for myself and the children to have met you, Luang Poh."

"Great fortune for me, too," said the father. "If I didn't come and prac-

tice meditation here I would still not know the difference between good and evil. Before this, all I thought of was how to get money. Now I feel that money is not always the most important thing. Happiness and peace of mind are more valuable. I would like to declare in your presence that from now on I will desist from all evil actions, do good, and try to purify my mind." His "give up all evil actions" had a deeper meaning unknown to his three sons, who had no idea that their father was a drug peddler or that their older brother was an addict.

"Luang Poh, will he die?" the mother asked, worried for her husband.

"I'm not afraid of dying now, Luang Poh," he said bravely. "Having practiced like this I don't feel so afraid of death as I used to. If in giving up evil I have to die, I am happy to do so." The shame and fear of wrong doing that had arisen in his mind had given him so much repugnance for evil actions that he now saw dying as better than living an evil life.

"You won't die, because someone else will die in your place," the Phra Khru said enigmatically.

"Who, Luang Poh? Is it me? If it is, I am happy to die in his place, as long as he doesn't take a new wife. I don't want my children to be raised by a stepmother," she said, looking far ahead.

"No, it's not you. No, don't ask me, when the time comes you will know yourselves. The important thing is to keep practicing every day. Believe me just this once."

"Luang Poh," Tor spoke up, "my brothers and I would like to ask your forgiveness for insulting you on the first day we came."

"Oh, how did you insult me?"

"We spoke badly and thought badly of you. I was angry that you wouldn't let us eat in the evening, so we criticized you among ourselves. Mum and Dad didn't know anything about it." Having said this, Tor led his brothers in bowing to the monk three times.

"It's agreed, I forgive you, but in fact you had no wrong. Your determination to practice meditation relieved you of blame."

"We would like to ask your forgiveness, too, Father, for resenting being forced to come here. Now we know that you did it because you love us and wanted only our benefit," the young man said. As he said this, they all bowed at the feet of their father, who was so moved that tears came to his eyes. The faces of the children, too, were wet with tears, while the mother was openly crying.

"All right, you can go back and practice at your lodgings now. This is your last night, resolve to practice to your utmost and you will be relieved

of your bad karma and sorrow and receive only good fortune. Tomorrow, before you go, don't forget to take leave of Ajahn Buahyao."

"We won't forget. We are indebted to Ajahn Buahyao, one day we will have to pay his kindness."

"Ajahn Buahyao has his own karma. Everybody has karma. I have it, too, I think it is heavier than either yours or Ajahn Buahyao's." He spoke flatly, without any sign of fear, as a result of the training that he had done.

When the man and his family had left, the Phra Khru went upstairs to continue writing. Tonight there were no visitors, they were probably tired out from the new year's festivities.

On the morning of the fourth of January, 1974, after the morning meal, the man and his wife and children went to take leave of the Phra Khru and then Phra Buahyao. The three boys felt very sad at leaving the monastery, especially Tom, who almost refused to leave.

"Luang Poh, please send your psychic power to influence my mother and father to allow me to ordain. I want to ordain with my father's full consent and without my mother crying. Otherwise I wouldn't feel right," Tom said sincerely. The Phra Khru looked at him and smiled, but didn't say anything.

"I'm not thinking of ordaining, Luang Poh, but I would like to ask permission to come here on my school holidays. Can I?" asked Ting.

"Yes, please yourself, I'll always be happy to receive you."

"I've determined to come every Friday night and stay for the weekend. If I waited till the school holidays I would miss you too much," Tor added.

A couple approached the lodging followed by three boys of similar age. The five of them came and sat behind the layman and his family, bowed three times and sat quietly, waiting their turn. When the other family had risen and left, they all moved forward and bowed to the monk once again.

"What brings you here? Haven't seen you for a long time, I thought you'd forgotten all about me," the Phra Khru said easily. The man's name was Niyom, and he had ordained with the Phra Khru for one Rains Retreat three years ago. This was the first time he had come back since he had disrobed.

"I must ask your forgiveness, Luang Poh, I've been so busy ever since I left Bangkok and went to the provincial office I haven't had a chance to stop," Niyom reported.

"Now he's moved to the Ministry for the Interior, Luang Poh," his wife said. She was a doctor at a hospital in Bangkok.

"Is that so? And which is better, the new job or the old one?"

"They're pretty much the same, heavy in different ways. But physically heavy work is no problem, it's the mental burden that's heavy. I'm afraid I won't be able to stick it out." The look on his face showed that he meant what he said.

"What's the problem? Can you tell me about it? Maybe I can help."

"I can tell you about it, but I don't want to bother you with trying to help me, because the problem is probably beyond your ability. It's the corruption. What I've seen makes me feel really sorry for the country. They're all in for a cut of the cake, from the smallest officials right up to the top."

"This problem I can do nothing about, it's more than I can handle, like you say. Just leave it to the law of karma, just watch it impassively," the Phra Khru said soothingly.

"Sometimes I find it impossible to just sit there, Luang Poh, seeing the good people being exploited by the bad. A friend of mine works in the Ministry for Industry. One day a businessman came to ask permission to set up a factory. My friend looked at the plans and saw that they weren't up to the specifications required by the Ministry, so he rejected it. The next day the businessman came back. This time he brought a wad of money with him. As soon as he arrived he shoved the envelope stuffed with money toward him. My friend said, 'I am a civil servant, I already have a salary, I don't need your money. If you plan your factory according to the law, I'll sign the permission for free.' The man was very angry. The next day he came again, this time with the Prime Minister's name card, and said the Prime Minister had ordered him to sign. My friend said, 'In that case, you tell the Prime Minister to come and tell me himself.' That was all he said, but the results were very fast."

"What kind of results?" asked the Phra Khru.

"This event happened in the morning. In the afternoon he was urgently transferred to an ineffectual post. They call it a 'floating post.' Six of his friends who were also involved were transferred, too. Seven people transferred all at once."

"It's a sad thing for the nation. They don't look after their good citizens. It'll make the good people lose heart in their work," Dr. Nalin spoke up. Their three sons were having trouble sitting in the formal pa-piap posture, so they got up and ran outside to play in the temple grounds. They had been to the temple before, when their father had ordained. At that time they had come very often, so they felt very much at home in the monastery.

"I reckon the Prime Minister shouldn't have done that. If they do things

like that the country won't survive," Niyom said

"It's not the Prime Minister's handiwork, don't go blaming him, you'll only make bad karma," said the owner of the lodging.

"What do you mean," Niyom asked bewilderedly.

"I mean that the Prime Minister's name was simply used as a front," the Phra Khru explained as he had "seen" it, "but the real villain in your friend's case was his boss, the one who authorized the transfer, not the Prime Minister."

"But his boss was in for it too. He was one of the seven people who were transferred," Niyom protested.

"Well then, the boss's boss. Have you forgotten that expression, 'Beyond the sky there's more sky?'" The Phra Khru's words allowed Niyom to suddenly understand it all, and at the same time softened his resentment of a civil service system which did not foster good, honest employees.

"Well, I wasn't going to say anything," Doctor Nalin spoke up, "but since we're on the subject I would like to get this off my chest. I saw it with my own eyes, I'm not scandalizing anybody. If anybody wants to sue me, I'll gladly contest it, because I made a tape recording as evidence."

"You have a story to tell also, Doctor?" the Phra Khru said, smiling.

"I wasn't going to bring it up, but now that my husband has brought up the subject of his friend's transfer, I want to take the opportunity to tell you about my younger sister. She ended up losing almost a million baht. She's a business woman, completely honest and above board. The man who had to sign her proposal was the Permanent Secretary. Before she could meet him she had to bribe her way up the line, from the secretary to the secretary-general, the secretary to the Permanent Secretary, and even the driver of the Permanent Secretary. And just yesterday she made an appointment with the Permanent Secretary to receive the money at her house. She invited me to go along, and I secretly made a tape recording of the meeting.

"The Permanent Secretary came with his driver, carrying an empty brief case. When they had come in, my sister introduced me, telling him that she was single and did not yet have a partner, so she invited her older sister. My sister started bringing out one hundred baht notes, fresh from the mint, and stuffed them into the brief case. She stuffed them in until the brief case was bulging. And she put twenty thousand into an envelope for his driver."

"And how much was in the brief case?" the monk asked flatly.

"Five hundred thousand—five thousand one hundred baht notes, fresh from the mint. Do you know, Luang Poh? When he walked into the house

he looked so straight and proud, but when he walked out he was bent over with the weight of the brief case. My sister asked him teasingly, 'Can you manage all right, sir? I will get one of the servants to carry it to the car for you.' He said no, he could manage on his own. My sister sent him off to his car, and gave the envelope with the twenty thousand to the driver, who was waiting. I was disgusted. Him the Permanent Secretary! I thought to myself, 'Remember this man's name and surname, so you can tell your children and grandchildren never to trust this family of extortionists.'

"But you said your sister's business dealings were completely above board, why did she have to pay him the money?" The monk couldn't quite understand the reasoning.

"They wouldn't sign the papers. It was a multi-hundred million baht business deal, time was of the essence. When she saw them passing it from table to table she realized she'd have to use some money. The reason they kept passing her application around was so they could get her money, Luang Poh."

"That's terrible! People these days aren't afraid of bad karma at all," the Phra Khru said as the doctor finished her story. They were silent for a while, and then Niyom said,

"While we're on the subject I'm reminded of another friend of mine, a second class colonel in the Police Force. One day he seized a truck carrying opium. The driver mentioned the name of a certain first class general and said that he'd better let him go. He wouldn't let the driver go, and he was expelled from the Police Force. He was furious. He said he'd worked honestly but all he got for his efforts was expulsion. His friends who were dishonest were all promoted and had pay rises. How is Thailand going to prosper if it keeps operating like this?"

"We'll just have to keep watching the situation. If we don't die too soon we'll probably find out. The important thing," he warned, "is not to follow the example of those corrupt officials. We must look after our own virtue."

"I certainly won't follow their example. I'm really frustrated these days, I wanted to come and get your advice. Should I leave the civil service and go into business? I'm absolutely fed up with the civil service system. Everybody else is busy getting their share, and when I don't take any they resent it. The bosses don't like me very much."

"Don't leave, it's not necessary. Stay on and be a bone in their throats, that's good. At least the country will have some good people slowing down the corruption. If you leave they'll be free of a splinter in their sides and

proceed to rob the country blind, and the country will go to ruin even faster.”

“In that case, I guess I’d better take my leave. This was all I wanted to ask you. And also to come and pay my respects and wish you the best for the new year.” He turned to his children but they weren’t there. “Where have the children got to?”

“They’re over there, playing in the water behind the monastery. Just now they were running around the temple grounds, then they got hot and went to play in the water,” the monk said, as if he had seen it with his own eyes. The man and his wife walked over to the boat landing and found their children, who had stripped off their clothes and were jumping around in the water having a great time, in spite of the weather being cool.

“Gong, Geng, Glah, come on up now. Mum and Dad are going home,” Doctor Nalin called out. Gong called his brothers and they all came clambering up from the water and ran to their clothes piled up on the grass of the river bank.



Chapter 33

The 23rd of January, 1974, was a full-moon observance day. Even before dawn, many people had begun gathering in the Wat. The days and nights were passing, the old year had gone out and the new year in, but the Phra Khru's responsibilities seemed to just get heavier and heavier as people experienced more and more problems in life. Problems seemed to be the natural by-product of material progress.

When he had finished his duties in the uposatha hall, the Phra Khru would walk to his lodging, where many people were already waiting for him, and sit and listen to their problems from six in the morning to seven thirty. Then he would go up to do the morning chanting and eat the morning meal with the other monks at the main hall where the faithful villagers brought food to the monks every observance day.

The first one with problems was a businessman from Bangkok. His face was miserable, because his business was losing money. One of his relatives had advised him that the Abbot of Wat Ambhavan was good at solving problems, so he had made the effort to come and wait, enduring the mosquitoes, since four in the morning.

"What can I help you with?" asked the monk, getting straight down to business.

"I'm in a real fix, Luang Poh. My business has just lost ten million baht. If you don't help me I'll surely go bankrupt," he pleaded.

"What sort of business do you do?"

"I manufacture clothing for export. This is my third year. The first two years I had a really good profit, but beginning last year I started to make a loss, and my business just got worse and worse. Now I'm almost finished. Please give me some advice."

"Well, I'm not really experienced with business matters. Maybe you

can help explain the process to me, and I'll see if I can figure out why the business has been losing."

The man explained, "I have a factory that cuts and sews clothing, both for adults and children, male and female. I send samples for the market to look at. The markets are in the United States, Europe and Japan. They make really big orders, so that I can barely get the clothes made in time. The business only really went well for the first two years. Last year it began to go bad and I incurred terrible losses. I can't figure out why it's been this way."

The Phra Khru was forced to use his "perceiving" to look into the matter. In a moment he said, "You know the reason very well. Do you want me to say it straight out?"

The businessman, aged a little over fifty, was silent for a moment, then he said softly, "Yes, Luang Poh, go ahead and say it."

The owner of the lodging then said, "It's because you cheated on your customers. When you sent the samples you used very good, expensive cloth, but when you got the big orders you used a different cloth that looked very similar, but of inferior quality and much cheaper. You were too greedy, you wanted huge profits. They knew what you were about and so they didn't make any more orders. You can't blame your customers for this, can you?" he said, applying his words to everybody in the room so they could gain some teaching from the story.

"Everybody else does it, it's normal, Luang Poh," the man said, trying to excuse himself.

"Oh, that means that whatever everybody does, regardless of what it is, is always right, is that it?"

He looked doubtful. "Well, maybe not."

"In that case, it would be better to tell me truly whether what you did was right or wrong. Just tell me straight out, I don't like beating around the bush."

"Okay, it was wrong, but it did make me rich quickly. Everybody who did it made money really fast," he said, adhering to his views.

"I don't think that's true. If it was true you wouldn't be coming to see me for help. Or do you disagree?"

"No, I don't disagree. Luang Poh, please advise me how I can revive my business."

"It's not difficult at all, but it won't be easy if you can't do as I say."

"I'll do anything you say," the businessman said, his hopes rising.

"Good. All you others remember this case, it's a good example of what

not to do." Of the people sitting in his lodging, there were two others who had exactly the same problem. By answering this one man thoroughly he would be also answering their problems, "killing three birds with one stone."

Before answering, he said, "Don't think that I am trying to humiliate you. Just now you said that everyone does this sort of thing, so that means it's not embarrassing to you, right?"

"Yes, that's right. I won't be offended if your advice means I can sell just as much clothing as before," the businessman said, laying down his conditions.

"In that case, listen well. Your actions have been dishonest, you have been cheating your customers. Earning a living dishonestly may make you rich fast, but your wealth doesn't last long, and in the end you go to ruin."

"So how do I correct the problem?"

"Firstly, you have to stop cheating your customers by 'stuffing the goods,' right? Isn't that what they call your actions—'stuffing the goods'?"

"Yes, that's what they call it. These days they all do it, otherwise you don't get rich," he added.

"There, there you go again. I just taught you and you go straight back to your old thinking."

"But it's true, Luang Poh, I'm just relating the truth," he said stubbornly.

"You're more stubborn than a cat—and a cat's pretty stubborn."

"I won't be stubborn anymore, I'll agree to whatever you say. I won't do what I've been doing any more. Whatever cloth I use for the samples, that's the cloth I'll use for the real goods."

"And the craftsmanship, too. You don't send a finely tailored cloth for samples and then send roughly sewn goods," he added.

"Gosh, Luang Poh, you're really meticulous. I'm impressed," he said, praising Luang Poh for the first time, and meaning it. If the monk had not said this he would have done exactly as he said, cheating the customers on the workmanship rather than the cloth, and so economizing on the cost price. Now that the Phra Khru had warned him against it, he would have to agree.

"Okay, I agree to follow your advice. And how long will it take for my business to revive?"

"Wait, I haven't finished yet. I have only covered one point, there's more. You will have to chant the Buddhist chants every day. Can you chant?"

"No, not at all."

"All right, never mind, I will give you a chanting book. Somebody has

printed it for free distribution." He produced some leaflets. They contained the chants printed in very big letters for easy reading. He passed one to the businessman, and two other men sitting nearby asked for copies also. One of them was a businessman who made leather bags for export, the other made shoes. Both of them had used the same method as the first man, "stuffing the goods." The three men looked at the pages in front of them and said in unison, "It's so hard to read!"

"What's so hard about it? They've printed it in such big letters and you say it's hard to read!"

"I mean the words," said the bag maker. The other two were thinking the same thing.

"That's because you've never chanted before. I've written it out in plain Thai to make it easier. If I used the Pali style of writing you would find it harder to read than this. But never mind, just keep reading it from the pages and you'll eventually be able to remember it. When you can remember it you'll be able to chant. If you don't want to go bankrupt you have to do this, understand?"

"Read all of it?"

"That's right, chant this once through and then chant the qualities of the Buddha through one time for each year of your age plus one."

"Which part is the qualities of the Buddha?"

"You don't know anything, do you?" the monk said, admonishing one man but making them all feel uncomfortable in the process.

"The qualities of the Buddha is the part from '*Itipi so*' up till the line '*Bhagavati*'. How old are you?"

"I'm forty eight," the bag maker answered.

"In that case you have to chant it forty-nine times."

"And how can I keep from losing count? I'm sure I'll lose count."

"You can find your own way to remember. I believe a businessman will be able to find a way to count them."

"Use match sticks," said the owner of the shoe business.

"In that case, I'm fifty six years old, that means I have to chant it fifty-seven times, right, Luang Poh?" asked the first man despondently.

"Yes, it'll have to be that," answered the owner of the lodging.

"And where can I get the time to do that? I hardly have a spare minute in a day."

The Phra Khru was beginning to despair of these businessmen.

"Make up your own minds, then. If you can't do it you won't be successful, but if you can you'll see results in three months at the most."

"Can my wife chant also?"

"Yes, that will make the results appear even sooner."

"Can I have my wife chant in my place?" he bargained.

"No, she can't chant in your place, you have to help each other chant. That is, both of you chant together, each for the number of years in their age plus one. How old is your wife?"

"She's forty six."

"Then she should chant forty-seven times, do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, thank you, Luang Poh," Now that he knew how to solve his problem, the businessman took his leave. It happened that the other two business men also left, so it seemed the Phra Khru had indeed been successful in his "bird shooting."

"Luang Poh, my husband and I have a housing appliances factory. We've never 'stuffed the goods,' and never cheated our customers, but how come our business isn't successful?" asked a woman in her thirties. She had come with her husband of the same age who was sitting with head bowed beside her. The Phra Khru used his "perceiving" to consider the matter, and reported, "You don't look after the angels (phra) of the house."

"There aren't any angels in our house," the man said, raising his head. "You mean Buddha statues, don't you?" his wife asked.

"No, not Buddha statues, I mean your mother and father. It is because you don't look after them that your business isn't prospering."

"I look after them, it's our neighbors who put there parents in an old people's home," said the wife.

"There you go, taking others for your example. I've just told the man who just left about this," he said, referring to the businessman. "I beg you, patrons, don't look outside of yourselves. Look at yourselves. Wherever there are faults, just go about rectifying them without worrying about what other people are like. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Luang Poh, please tell us how to rectify ourselves."

"Before you can address a problem you have to know where your fault is. Where are you faulty, do you know?"

"No, I don't know."

"There, you see? You don't even know yourself, but you go around knowing other people. Still, I'm not surprised, because other people are just the same as you." The lady seemed to brighten up on hearing that she wasn't the only one who had faults. At least she had some "friends."

"Luang Poh, please point out my faults for me, then I can find a way to rectify them."

"All right, in that case listen carefully. You don't look after your father and mother: you make them live at the factory in a dark and cramped room and eat with your employees while you yourselves live in a big house with your husband and your children, eating lavish food. Is what I say true or not?"

"It's true" she said softly, now seeing her fault very clearly.

"It's good that you accept it. Now I'll tell you the way to rectify the problem. You must take your parents into your own house. When you get back home from the temple, organize it immediately. However you live, you must have your parents live just the same. When you go back home you must get some flowers, incense and candles and go and ask your parents' forgiveness, wash their feet and ask them to forgive you. Then your business will gradually become more and more prosperous. Can you do this?"

"Yes, I can. In that case, my husband and I ask to take our leave."

The third "complainant" was just beginning to describe his problem when Somchai interrupted the conversation, approached the Phra Khru and said, "Luang Poh, Sir, please go up to the main hall, it is already many minutes late."

"Oh, is it time already?"

"It was time many minutes ago, Sir," repeated Somchai.

The Phra Khru addressed the people sitting there, "Just a minute, I'd like to take a small break. Patrons, you may go and have a meal at the kitchen, it's already prepared. Everybody is invited. If you come to Wat Ambhavan and don't eat then you haven't been to Wat Ambhavan." Then he rose from his seat and was just walking towards the eating hall when a young teenage girl ran frantically up to him, bent down to her knees, put her palms together and said,

"Luang Poh! I ask for one minute of your time. I have an urgent matter to discuss with you," she said breathlessly, not bothering to enter the queue.

"Go ahead and tell me about it, Miss," he said.

"My older sister has been hit by a car and is in a critical condition in the Intensive Care Unit. I've come to seek your virtues as a protection for her so that she will survive." The Phra Khru knew that among the people who had come to see him today there were three others who had the exact same intention as this young girl, so he said to them, "All right. Those who have come on matters of life and death, please write the names on a piece of paper and leave it on the tray next to my seat—the name of the person

who is dying, that is, not your own name." It was necessary for him to be specific about the names because different people had different levels of intelligence, and many were the times people had misunderstood him. Having said this, he walked to the main hall, while the complainants all went to the kitchen for the morning meal.

An hour later, the Abbot walked back to his kuti. He asked for time to go and wash his hands and rinse his mouth in the bathroom under the stairs, and then came out to take his seat. In the tray were four pieces of paper. He picked them up and read them one by one, then said, "See this? When people are dying they come to ask me for help, as if I were a magician," he winked to the complainants sitting in the last row.

"Luang Poh, I'd really like to know whether it is possible to help a person who is dying, to prevent him from dying?" The questioner was a man aged about fifty.

"It depends on karma, patron. If they must die, I can do nothing to help them. Not just me, but even a great and powerful person from anywhere you like would be unable to prevent their death. By 'depends on their karma' I mean that if they still have some good karma I may be able to help increase it, but if they have no good karma at all I can't help them. To use a comparison, it's like a battery. If I charge the battery, but the cells are dried up and can't hold any charge, the power just leaks out uselessly. This matter is very complicated. What I have described is not entirely correct, because there are other factors involved as well. If I tried to explain them all, the whole of today wouldn't be enough time to do so. It's better to look at what's of more immediate concern." Having said this, the third complainant came out with his problem.

"Luang Poh, I've got a problem with my children. My sons and daughters have gotten nowhere, even though my wife and I have looked after them well. I am an engineer, my wife is a teacher at a University, but not even one of the children follows in our footsteps," said the fifty year old engineer, releasing his pent up frustration.

"How many children do you have?"

"Four, sir, two boys and two girls."

"Are they married yet?"

"I don't think so. They don't live with their parents any more, they've all moved out of the house. My sons have become delinquents and my daughters are singers in nightclubs and bars," he said abrasively. "Perceiving" performed its duty immediately without even waiting for orders, and he knew well what state the family was in.

He said: "You shouldn't be too hard on your children. As if abusing them wasn't enough, you had to beat them as well. Your children are young men and young ladies, if you go and kick them they've got no choice but to run away. And your wife berated them almost every day. Who would want to live with you?" The engineer sat and hung his head, reflecting on the wrongs he had done to his children.

"What am I to do, Luang Poh, I want my children to come back home."

"You must chant, just as I recommended to the businessmen just now. Can you do that?" he asked, handing the man a copy of the chanting book. "Both of you can help in the chanting, you and your wife. When you finish chanting, spread loving kindness to your children, develop thoughts of desire for their well being, and in no long time they will come back. And don't go abusing them any more. Speak kindly to them. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I can," said the man firmly, then he took his leave.

The Phra Khru helped many more complainants with their problems until eleven o'clock, when he invited them to go and have a meal at the kitchen, while he took the note of names of dying people up stairs to "send mental force" to help them. It would be another hour before the people had finished their meal, and that one hour was for the four people who were dying. The hours following that would be for the complainants, and who knew when that would be finished? The Abbot of Wat Ambhavan truly lived for the benefit of others.

Chapter 34

Phra Buahyao had made the private observation that most of the people who came to seek the Phra Khru's advice about Dhamma were Chinese. Few of the Thais who came to see him were interested in Dhamma. Most of them came to the monastery just to bring in a chest full of problems for him to solve. Once he had given his advice they would just disappear, and wouldn't be seen again until they had another problem for him. Not like the Chinese, who came regularly, and were also interested in practicing Dhamma and really putting effort into it so that they were able to solve their own problems. The Phra Khru praised Chinese people on this account, and on other accounts as well.

On this particular morning the weather seemed fresher and clearer than other days, and there were no visitors, as according to the schedule the Phra Khru would have to go and give some teachings in Bangkok. However, the organizer of the venue had sent a telegram asking to postpone it, so in fact he had gone nowhere.

After the morning meal Phra Buahyao took the opportunity to go and ask some questions about Dhamma practice with his teacher, and also give him a chance to gauge his practice.

"Luang Poh, I've been overwhelmed by *thinamiddha*, the hindrance of sleepiness. I seem to be sleepy all the time: even when I walk meditation. I've tried all the methods you recommend for dealing with sleepiness but none of them work, so I have to sleep. It seems to be the only way to get rid of it."

"And does it go away then?" asked his preceptor.

"No, it doesn't. And when I lie down I can't get to sleep. I feel so sleepy it seems all I want to do is sleep, but when I lie down I can't get to sleep. Why is that?"

"That is a sign of *ñāna*, Buahyao, it is not the hindrance of sleepiness at all."

"What do you mean, sir?" his pupil asked.

"It means the symptoms you have described are the symptoms of one who has reached the level of *nibbidañāna*, the knowledge of world weariness, the eighth level of knowledge."

"That means I've already come half way?" said Phra Buahyao happily.

"That's right, but don't get chuffed about it. Many people have reached this level of insight, you're not the only one. The latest person to attain it was the son of the rich man, I think his name was Tom."

"That means I've progressed slower than him?"

"Looks like it. But your slowness is what the Westerners call 'slow and steady,' do you understand?"

"I never learned English. Maybe you can translate it for this unlearned and ignorant student, Sir."

"You're so humble! What day is it today, that Phra Buahyao has become so humble and polite?" joked the teacher.

"It's definitely not Observance day," answered the student immediately.

"I know that, but I want to know why it is that you are being so modest. You're not usually so modest."

"But today I want knowledge, other days I don't want it," said Phra Buahyao, taking the opportunity to bait the Phra Khru.

"What knowledge is it that you want?" his preceptor asked.

"The knowledge of how to get rid of sleepiness that arises from insight into world-weariness."

"All right. I'll tell you so I can make some merit." Then he proceeded to explain the method of practice once one attains the insight into world weariness, the same as he had explained to Tom. The young monk thanked him and then asked,

"And the English phrase you said just now, 'low low edree,' or whatever, what does that mean?"

"It means even though you've reached the eighth level of insight slower than Tom, it doesn't mean that you'll reach the higher stages after him. Looking at your face I can tell that even though you aren't particularly clever, you will definitely attain at least Stream Entry. That is," he explained, "in this life."

"And what about Tom? Since he attained the eighth stage before me,

shouldn't he get to the sixteenth stage before me?"

"It doesn't work like that, Buahyao. A lay person coming to practice in the monastery may attain the eighth, ninth or even thirteenth stage, but once they go back to their homes they get pulled around by their environment, and their practice stops right there. Take Tom for instance: he wants to ordain but his parents won't let him. When he gets back home he will get attached to worldly pleasures once more and forget the practice. So he stops at the eighth level of insight."

"But if he ordained as a monk, he would make rapid progress, right?" he only realized after he had said it that he had asked another stupid question.

"That's right, because the atmosphere in the monastery is more conducive to the practice of Dhamma than at home. Another thing is that maintaining a celibate life helps to make the practice more fluid because the training has many aspects that differ from lay life. That's why monks hold the advantage over lay people in this respect," the Phra Khru explained without bothering to contest his questioner's wisdom.

A forty year old man approached, followed by a young man about twenty years old. They both bowed to the Phra Khru, and then the older man said,

"I haven't come to see you for a long time. How are you going?"

"Do I look all right?" the owner of the lodging asked in return. This man was one of his brothers. They had played together when they were children. The younger man was the Phra Khru's nephew.

"Venerable Uncle, my father asks you properly, but you answer in jest," his nephew said, fluttering his eyelids girlishly.

"Don't you go acting that way with me, Khun Thong, you're not a woman," said the Phra Khru, noticing his affected mannerisms.

"Whether I'm a woman or a man is no concern of yours, Venerable Uncle," Khun Thong said, making long faces and showing disapproval. The Phra Khru felt sorry for him, so he used his "perceiving" to look into him, and found that his nephew's mind was actually that of a woman. It was hard to believe. When he was born, the Phra Khru had seen for himself that he was definitely a boy, but over time he had become a girl. Amazing! Another case of impermanence, suffering and insubstantiality.

Phra Buahyao was having a good conversation with his preceptor before being interrupted by these two, and aversion had arisen in him, but when he reflected that they were relatives of Luang Poh's he tried to suppress his annoyance and decided to say something positive:

"You are really lucky to meet Luang Poh today. Actually he was supposed to go and give a talk in Bangkok."

"Is that so? Why didn't you go?" Khum asked.

"They sent a telegram asking to postpone it. That was lucky for me, too, because it isn't often I get a chance to talk with you these days. If it's an observance day, there's no way we could talk, visitors are packed into my kuti."

"Oh, so now you sell that well, huh, Venerable Brother?" his younger brother asked.

"If you could trade places with me you would see for yourself. But tell me, what brings you here today?" he asked, "Can I help you with something?" He knew that if they didn't have some problem for him to help them with, these two wouldn't have come to see him. Khun Thong looked fixedly at the Phra Khru's face, and asked, "Since when has Venerable Uncle worn glasses?" He finished his sentence with the "ka" that Thai women use. At first he had tried to hide his identity, fearing that the Phra Khru would upbraid him, but seeing that the Phra Khru didn't say anything, he decided to speak as he usually did.

"Ten years already. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing, it's just that you look different, you look more handsome with glasses than without them. But is it long or short?" he asked, giggling to himself.

"What are you talking about, 'long or short'? Speak clearly, will you?"

"Why, Venerable Uncle, I was only asking you whether your eyesight was long or short, whether you have to wear glasses because you are near-sighted or far-sighted." The speaker twisted and turned shyly where he sat. The Phra Khru found his nephew's mannerisms offensive, but knowing that he was so due to karma, he didn't bother hurting his feelings by upbraiding him. When the other party was ready to be improved by his words, then he would give a teaching.

"The doctors say I'm far-sighted. Anyway, what have you come to see me about? Out with it," he said to Khun Thong's father.

"It's not me," said Khum, "we've come to see you about Khun Thong: he's getting drafted into the army. I wanted to ask you to help get him out of it, I feel sorry for him."

"Oh, twenty-one years old already? It seems only yesterday you were running around playing. You're being drafted already?"

"Yes, now I'm a fully grown young lady, Venerable Uncle," said Khun Thong.

"A young man, a young man, Khun Thong. You're a man, remember," his father hastened to correct him. He was so depressed that the son he had raised had become a daughter.

"All right, if he wants to be a girl, never mind," the Phra Khru comforted him, then he turned to Khun Thong.

"But don't overdo it, Khun Thong, enough is enough. So if, as you say, you're a woman, why do you have to register for the draft?"

Khun Thong thought for a moment, then said, "Yes, that's what I'd like to know. They go by the birth certificate. You've got to help me," the young man said worriedly. "Venerable Uncle. If I get drafted I'll be gang raped by the whole army!"

"Listening to you, one would think you were very pretty!" said the Phra Khru .

"Prettier than Venerable Uncle, anyway," countered Khun Thong.

"All right, whatever you say," yielded the Phra Khru. Khun made a weary face and commiserated to the monk in front of his son, "I don't know what karma I've made, Venerable Brother, that my son isn't like other people's boys. What karma have I made? Have a look for me."

"What are you worrying about, Khun? Khun Thong isn't worried, right, Khun Thong?" he asked the nephew who had become a niece.

"Right. Why are you worried about it, father?" Khun Thong said teasingly, then, as if he had just thought of it, "Venerable Uncle, what karma have I made to be born a transvestite? Within my heart I want to be a woman, but why have I been born as a man?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, I do. I want Father to know too, so that he will stop complaining about me once and for all."

"All right then, if you want to know I will tell you. Listen well, Buahyao, and remember my words. Later on, if someone asks you about this you will be able to answer them."

"Yes, Luang Poh, I'm all ears. Even if no-one asks me about it later on, I'll bear it in mind anyway. Please go ahead and speak, Luang Poh," he said, putting his hands in the official "inviting a monk" posture.

"Why, Venerable Brother, your words really speak to my heart," Khun Thong said, squealing with delight. He felt that there was a real bond between him and this young monk. The Phra Khru looked at his student, then looked at his nephew, and said, "Khun Thong, you are like this because of your past karma. In a previous life you were a playboy, you regularly broke the precepts. The fruit of your conduct has put you in this state,

and if you don't do something about it you will have to be born like this for another six lifetimes."

"You mean there's a way to deal with it?" Khum asked.

"There is a way, but I doubt if Khun Thong can do it."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the man with the karma.

"You must come and enter a meditation retreat."

When he heard this, Khun Thong blurted out, "Whaaaa! Blow me over with a feather! Venerable Uncle wants Miss Khun Thong to enter a retreat!"

"You see? Already you're kicking up a fuss. Have it your way then. If you want to keep on being like this, that's your business," said the Phra Khru with resignation.

"Then just help to stop him from being drafted. Someone suggested something already, but he wouldn't believe them and just kept pestering me to bring him here."

"What did they suggest?"

Khun Thong looked meaningfully at his father and knitted his eyelids as if to say "Don't say it," but Khum ignored him and said "They suggested putting some black army ants on his testicles, then once they were swollen he could tell the army doctors that he had a hernia." The Phra Khru and Phra Buahyao both wanted to laugh, but Khun Thong was looking so uncomfortable they restrained themselves. Khum added, "Khun Thong refused to do it, so now we've come to see you."

The Phra Khru said, "It's a good thing you didn't follow their advice, you won't be making any more bad karma on account of it. Why do you want to deceive them like that? I've seen someone who did this already, he lived just out front of the Wat. He did just the same as you said, but, excuse me, in no long time he really did get a hernia. It was his karma for deceiving others. You can cheat others, but cheating the government is especially bad karma. You see? His karma gave fruit. Cheating the government is heavier than cheating on other people."

"And what happened to him, Venerable Brother?" Khum asked.

"What else? He had to go into hospital and have an operation. But the operation wasn't successful: not only did the hernia not heal but he also contracted cancer."

"Where did he get cancer? What part of the body?" Khun Thong asked, shyly but with interest.

"That part. He lived less than a year before he died. They say his private parts went gangrenous; where he had let the black ants sting him all swelled up and putrefied. His relatives brought the body to burn in this

Wat. It's a good thing, Khun Thong, that you didn't follow their advice, otherwise you might have gone rotten also."

"Oooh! Don't speak about it, Venerable Uncle, it gives me the creeps," Khun Tong said, putting his hands to his ears.

"So it's agreed that Venerable Brother will help him out," Khum summarized.

"Yes, I can, but there must be an exchange."

"What exchange, Venerable Uncle? Anything so long as it isn't coming to enter a retreat here, okay?"

"Err, okay, if that's how it must be, but you must come and live with me here in this kuti. You can help me receive visitors, put out water for them and so on." The Phra Khru figured that if Khun Thong had a chance to live in close contact with him his karma may be alleviated somewhat. He had decided to at least try to help the man.

"Okay, I agree. It's good, I won't have to listen to my mother and father's complaints, and I'll get a chance to meet a lot of people. I'll just go back and get my clothes, Father."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. Leave it till after the business about the draft is finished, that's another two months away yet," said Khum, but the Phra Khru didn't agree.

"Let him come right now, I'm in need of a helper. If he lives close to me he may develop a little more desire to be a man."

"Never, never, I wouldn't want to become a man even if you paid me. I wouldn't mind being a woman, then I wouldn't be always hounded by Mother and Father," said Khun Thong, long faced.

"That doesn't sound so good, Venerable Brother," said Khum with concern. "He may just get worse. Better leave him live with me. At least he'll be in my sight."

"No need to worry, Khum, trust me. I think I can be of help, it's not beyond me. He should at least improve a bit, I guarantee it."

"In that case, whatever you say. He may get better as you say. If he does it'll be his own good fortune. And if he doesn't get better we can just put it down to his own karma."

"Good, if you can think like that that's good, you won't suffer. Just reflect that everybody has their karma. Everybody is born into this world to receive the fruits of karma. Whether the fruit is good or bad depends on the kind of karma they have committed."

"That means that those who do good karma are born again, and those who make bad karma are born again also, right, Venerable Brother?" Khum

asked.

"Right."

"In that case, how do we avoid getting born again, if doing good karma also leads to rebirth?"

"The karma that does not lead to rebirth is the karma known as 'neither black nor white karma.' Black karma is bad karma, white karma is good karma. The karma that is neither black nor white is the karma that is neither bad nor good. You might call it neutral karma."

"And what do you have to do to make that sort of karma?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"You must practice according to the Eightfold Path. Your walking meditation, sitting meditation, and maintenance of mindfulness in all postures at all times is practicing the Eightfold Path, because that practice incorporates all eight factors of the Path, from Right View up to Right Concentration, including morality, concentration and wisdom."

"Well, Venerable Brother, the more you talk the less I understand you. I think we'll have to be going back now," said Khum. He had never taken an interest in such matters. "Let's go, Khun Thong. Go and get your clothes and then tomorrow you can come and stay."

"I'll get Somchai to go and pick up Khun Thong at home, that will save you wasting your work time," the Phra Khru offered.

"Thanks a lot, Venerable Brother. In any case, I leave my son in your care. Just feel sorry for him that he wasn't born whole like other people." The two of them prostrated to the Phra Khru and turned to prostrate to Phra Buahyao.

"Sorry for interrupting your conversation. I leave Khun Thong in your care, also," said Khum, excusing himself.

"Never mind, I'll give a hand to look after him," Phra Buahyao answered, feeling quite inspired by the father's love for his son.

"See you tomorrow, Venerable Brother, bye-bye!" Khun Thong looked coquettishly at Phra Buahyao and then followed his father outside. The Phra Khru shook his head slowly, saying, "This is karma. Do you see, Buahyao? Everybody has their karma."

"But Luang Poh, you once told me that if one transgressed the third precept one's wife would have a lover, one's husband would take a minor wife. Why has his case not turned out like that?"

"The workings of karma are extremely subtle and profound, Buahyao. I am not able to explain all of it to you. If you want to know you should devout yourself to the practice, then you will see for yourself, and then you

will have no more doubts."

"Yes, sir ... " Phra Buahyao had no time to finish what he was going to say, as Khun Thong motioned into the kuti once more, bowed and said:

"I completely forgot to thank you, Venerable Uncle, so I have come back to say thank you. I must thank you most reverently for helping me. May you live long, Sir." Having spoken he bowed three times once more, and then crawled out of the kuti. The Phra Khru said after him, "Hm. Thanks for the blessing. I'll live until the day I die. You're always coming up with something strange. I think there must be something wrong with your blood."

The man crawling out of the kuti turned back and said, "Yes. These days my periods are not very regular at all."

"Don't overdo it, Khun Thong. It's because of this that your parents are so depressed about you. I'm beginning to get a little depressed myself."

"It can't be helped. You invited me yourself, Venerable Uncle, you have to receive the fruits of your karma, right?" The Phra Khru didn't answer. Once his nephew was out of sight, he said, "I have a feeling we won't be able to retrieve him. What do you think, Buahyao?"

"I guess I don't say anything. I don't say anything because I don't know what to say. Or is there something you want me to say? Just tell me, Sir, don't be shy."

"Enough, Buahyao, if you say any more, I'll just get dizzy. Let's hear if you have any more doubts."

Chapter 35

There are many things I have doubts about, Luang Poh," said Phra Buahyao as timidly as could be.

"Then just tell me one at a time. Just regard today as your day, then you won't be able to go around saying I never give you any time."

"Why, Luang Poh, since I came here I have never gone around saying that, even once. How could I speak about you like that?" protested the young monk.

"You're sure, huh?" the Phra Khru asked.

"Yes, sure, one hundred percent sure."

"And what about what you just said to Khum, that I don't have any time. Do you know who said that?"

"Yes, I know who it was, but he didn't 'go around' saying it, he just sat right here, right where I'm sitting, and said it," he said, pointing at the floor where he sat. Teasing his preceptor was Phra Buahyao's greatest pleasure.

"Saved yourself again. Well, then, I admit it, you're clever. I've never seen anyone so clever as this before, really!"

"What do you mean 'like this'?"

"The kind they say, 'even if you throw three baskets full of olives at him you wouldn't be able to hit him'," answered the Phra Khru. He enjoyed bantering with his "past life younger brother," even though the other man had no idea that in a previous life he had been his preceptor's younger brother.

"In that case you should brush up on your target practice," Buahyao recommended. "Either that or use more olives, maybe four baskets. If you still don't get me you can use five or six baskets full. You must be able to get at least one on the target."

"Now then, now then, all you do is banter. What questions have you

got for me? I don't want to waste my breath."

"Yes sir. I myself like to breathe usefully, so I will just ask my questions." The Phra Khru nodded his permission, and Phra Buahyao was just opening his mouth to begin his questions when a man entered the kuti: the young monk was being interrupted once more.

Merchant Seng bowed to the Phra Khru three times, then bowed to Phra Buahyao, and said:

"I must ask your forgiveness for interrupting, but I really wanted to meet Luang Poh urgently."

"Greetings, Merchant. Have you come alone?"

"Yes, I came alone. I hired a taxi from Bangkok."

"Is that so? Why didn't you get Duang Suda to drive you here?"

"I don't want to put her to the trouble. Besides, I am coming today secretly. Neither Kim Ngór nor Duang Suda know I've come," answered Merchant Seng.

"Oh, and will you be staying? Or are you afraid they will worry about you at home?"

"No, I won't be staying. I just wanted to come and bow to you and then go back."

"Then at least stay and have something to eat for lunch. Invite your driver also. You're not in that much of a hurry, are you?"

"No, I planned to eat the midday meal here before going back, thank you Luang Poh for your kindness," he said, joining his palms in the formal posture.

"You're really lucky, merchant, to see Luang Poh today. Actually he had an invitation to go and give a talk in Bangkok, but the organizers postponed the talk at the last minute," said Phra Buahyao, hoping to be useful. He was disappointed when the seventy year old man said, "But I knew Luang Poh would be here today, that's why I spent 300 baht on a taxi. I came to experiment this very matter."

"How did you know I would be here," the Phra Khru asked with interest. The merchant explained:

"It's really strange, Luang Poh. Yesterday evening while I was sitting in meditation I began to think about you so much, no matter how I tried I couldn't stop. So I thought to myself, 'Tomorrow I must go and visit Luang Poh.' Then, as soon as I decided that, I began to worry whether you would be at the Wat or not, it not being an Observance Day. Since I wanted to meet you so much, I decided to concentrate my mind and then note 'perceiving, perceiving.' An image arose of you sitting in the Wat, and at the same time

I heard a voice whispering in my ear, 'Tomorrow the Phra Khru won't be going anywhere, he will be at the Wat.' So I've come to see whether my vision was true or not."

When he had finished, the Phra Khru said, "And do Kim Ngor or Duang Suda know about this?"

"I didn't tell Kim Ngor, I was afraid she'd think I was just being foolish. Duang Suda hasn't come to visit, she's at her house."

"That means the merchant has attained 'perceiving' is that right, Luang Poh?" asked Phra Buahyao excitedly.

"That's right. Do you see now that it's not really so difficult. There is nothing in this world that is beyond the ability of a human being with drive, true?"

"Yes, true, sir."

"I would like to offer my congratulations, merchant, you have exemplary effort and diligence," the Phra Khru said in admiration.

"I offer my congratulations also," added Phra Buahyao, feeling a mixture of pleasure and sadness. He felt happy that one of Luang Poh's students had progressed in the practice, but he also felt sad that he himself was dragging behind. He had wanted to attain "perceiving" for a long time, but without success, while Merchant Seng, who began practicing after him, had attained it before him.

His preceptor, knowing his train of thought, said, "Don't be disappointed, Buahyao, these things are not easily attained, and practicing in this life doesn't necessarily mean that you will attain results in this life. The Higher Knowledges (*abhiñña*) can only be attained by those who have accumulated their conditions from past lives. Besides, the reason you haven't got it is because you want it so much. Remember, if you want it, you don't get it; only if you don't want it will you get it."

"Now I'm really baffled, what does that mean?"

"It means that you haven't attained 'perceiving' because you want it too much. You have to make your mind indifferent, don't be over zealous, then you will attain it naturally," advised the Phra Khru.

"That means I have to resist my mind, pretend I don't want it. Isn't that lying?"

"No, you have to make your mind truly indifferent, otherwise you would be lying to yourself." Then the Phra Khru asked Merchant Seng, "In your meditation, did you wish to attain 'perceiving'? Did you make a resolution to attain it?"

"I never think like that. I only know that the path I am developing is

the supreme path to the complete cessation of suffering. If I really practice I may attain the cessation of suffering, but I don't practice with any particular desire in mind, all I do is make the right conditions in the present. As for the past and the future, I try not to think of them," answered merchant Seng, like one who has truly "entered the Dhamma."

Listening to him, Phra Buahyao felt ashamed, as he himself was still practicing with a great deal of desire to attain "perceiving," which was just greed.

"From now on, Luang Poh, I'll no longer have any desires. Listening to the merchant has made me feel ashamed of myself. I won't bother whether I attain 'perceiving' or not, because it has nothing to do with quelling suffering, right sir?"

"That's right, Buahyao. 'Perceiving' is the divine eye, one of the six Higher Knowledges (*abhiñña*). I think I've already explained to you that the first five of these Higher Knowledges are classed as mundane, they are within the ken of unenlightened beings who attain the Fourth state of absorption concentration (*jhana*). The sixth of the Higher Knowledges, however, is known as Knowledge of the Extinction of the Outflows (*asavakkhaya ñana*). It is a transcendent knowledge. Only the Arahants, the fully enlightened beings, attain it. Once attained, it cannot degenerate. As for the mundane Knowledges, they can all degenerate."

"In that case, the lower stages of Noble One, such as the Stream Enterer, may not have attained any of the Higher Knowledges?"

"That's right," explained the Phra Khru. "What's more, one who does attain some of the Higher Knowledges may not necessarily be a Stream Enterer, because the attainment of Stream Entry, in which the three fetters of attachment to self-view, doubt and attachment to rites and rituals, are in no way connected to the Higher Knowledges."

"But Luang Poh, just now you said that a monk will usually progress further in the practice than a lay person. Does that mean a lay person has no hope of attaining enlightenment? Like you said, some people attain the thirteenth stage of insight and then go no further."

"It isn't always the case, Buahyao. I gave that example just now only in reference to some of those who come to practice at the Wat. While they are in the Wat they may attain up to the thirteenth stage of insight, but once they go home they stop practicing, and so they are unable to proceed to the fourteenth or sixteenth level. But one who goes back home and continues to practice, and does so diligently, such as the merchant here, may indeed attain up to the sixteenth stage and become a Stream Enterer. A lay person

can even attain up to the level of Non-Returner."

"They can't attain Arahantship? Why is that Sir?"

"If they do attain Arahantship they must ordain within the same day, otherwise they will die."

"Why is that, Sir?" the elderly man asked, puzzled. Phra Buahyao was just about to ask the same question.

"Because it is not possible for the state or lifestyle of a lay person to support the state of Arahantship. It happened in the Buddha's time that a lay man who became fully enlightened didn't ordain because he had to look after his aging and blind parents. The very day of his enlightenment he was gored by a mad bull and died." At the mention of the word "bull," Phra Buahyao felt his hair stand on end for no apparent reason. Maybe it was his subconscious connection with cattle and buffaloes.

"So that bull had made very heavy karma, Luang Poh?" asked the merchant.

"Certainly bad karma. It is classed as one of the 'heinous deeds' to kill an Arahant."

"It doesn't seem right," said the elderly man sadly, "He was an Arahant, it doesn't seem possible that he could have ended up being gored by a bull."

"Come what may, nobody can flee the fruits of karma. The Buddha told this story to the bhikkhus because this Arahant had made bad karma with that bull. He had to pay." Listening to his preceptor's words, the young monk felt a pang in his heart, so he changed the subject, asking the merchant, "Are you ever sleepy when you sit in meditation? So sleepy that even if you get up and walk you're still sleepy?"

"Yes, at one time I was, but a long time ago. I think it was in the first month of my practice," answered the merchant.

"And what did you do?"

"I tried practicing more in the open air, eating less food, resting ..."

"Did your sleepiness go away?"

"No it didn't. I just got sleepier. I felt sleepy and also fed up with everything. I tried fighting it by maintaining mindfulness all the time. If I was sleepy I would note, 'sleepy, sleepy.' When I lied down and couldn't get to sleep I noted, 'can't sleep, can't sleep.' When I felt bored with everything I noted 'bored, bored.' You see, I didn't let go of mindfulness for a moment. I struggled like this for four or five days and the sleepiness went away. When that feeling disappeared I felt such a state of pleasure, I felt joyful at having conquered the sleepiness, and resolved my mind to con-

tinue with the practice. I'm already advanced in years, I don't know how much longer I will live. If I just waste my time eating and sleeping my life would be wasted. I would be throwing it away. That's how I thought, Sir."

"And did you not wonder what caused those feelings of sleepiness and depression with everything in the world?" asked the owner of the kuti. He wasn't asking for himself, but in order to give the older man a chance to 'teach,' indirectly, the young monk.

"I think it wasn't just ordinary sleepiness. It must have been the arising of some kind of Dhamma state. I feel sure that is so, Sir."

"That's right. That's the state of Knowledge of Disenchantment, and you dealt with it properly. The practice of Dhamma isn't easy, but if you are ardent and persistent it won't be beyond you ... the higher levels of Dhamma, that is." He used his perceiving and checked on the man sitting before him. He had attained the thirteenth level of insight knowledge and would probably attain the sixteenth in no long time. The Phra Khru didn't say anything, as he didn't want to discourage the young monk who had just attained the eighth level of insight knowledge.

Talking about sleepiness reminded the Phra Khru of a time when he was twelve or thirteen years old: "There's a funny story I'd like to tell you about, it's about sleepiness. I was living with my grandmother. At four in the morning my grandmother would wake me up to cook the rice for offering the monks on alms round. She had a fantastic way of waking me up. Maybe you can use it on your children and nephews and nieces," he said to Merchant Seng.

"What did she do?" he asked with interest.

"She didn't really do much. At first she would shake me and say, 'Little one, it's time to get up and cook the rice for the alms round.' I would be so sleepy, I'd just say, 'Yeah, yeah, I know, I just want to sleep a little longer.' Grandma would get up and walk on me. Just talking didn't have any effect. I was at the age when I wanted my sleep, so I said, 'Mm, that's really good massage. I was just feeling some aches and pains. You can walk on me every day from now on.'"

"And what did she do?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"She said, 'In that case I'll fetch a stick to help massage you. Such a lazy child! If I don't call you won't wake, if I don't wake you, you don't get up.'"

"And what did you do, Luang Poh?"

"What could I do? I had to get up as fast as I could and cook the rice. In those days we cooked rice in earthen pots, and used wood fuel. I made

the fire, but I was so sleepy, I got hold of a piece of kindling and fell asleep as I sat in front of the fire. When grandma saw me she gave me two big wallops, right here, in the face, once on the left and once on the right," he said, mimicking the actions.

"And what was it like?" asked Phra Buahyao, enjoying the story. The Phra Khru looked blankly at him and said, "I felt a little better."

"Your grandmother must have been really vicious," the merchant said.

"I don't know whether she was vicious or not but I was hit every day. Some days I was hit three times, after breakfast, lunch and dinner."

"She should have put in another one before going to bed. That's when the doctors prescribe medicine: after breakfast, lunch and dinner and before going to bed," said Phra Buahyao, going right off the subject.

"Sometimes I got one before sleep as well," confessed the kuti's owner.

"That means Luang Poh must have been quite a handful," said Phra Buahyao.

"Well, I wasn't heavy, because in those days I was thin," the preceptor said, teasing his pupil.

"Luang Poh, you know I didn't mean it like that. What I meant was a child who is beaten every day by his elders, three times a day, is probably no piece of cake, he must be really naughty."

"Naughty or not, I don't know, but everybody in the village called me 'the great bandit.'"

"And did you hate your grandmother for beating you? Getting beaten every day, did you hate her?" asked the layman.

"At the time I hated her, but now I feel only love for her, because if I didn't have granny's stick I probably wouldn't have become what I am today. I feel a lot of gratitude for what she did for me.

"There was one time I snuck off to go and look at the movies. I lied to granny that I was going to cram for the exams with my friends when I was actually going to see the movies with them. We got back late. When granny came to wake me I asked to have this one day off because I had been studying with my friends and was really tired. Couldn't I get up late just this once? Granny said to me, 'Little one, you can sleep, I don't mind, but before you sleep you have to get up and cook the rice for alms round, then have something to eat, then you can go back and have some more sleep.' You see? My granny had really shrewd methods for dealing with me. I had to get up, sleepy as I was, and build the fire for the rice. The fire wouldn't light. It took me ages to get it going, and I was afraid the rice wouldn't be ready in time for the monks on alms round so I threw a big chunk of kin-

dling on the fire. Whether it was because of my sleepiness or just my heavy handedness, I don't know, but the big log crashed into the rice pot and smashed it."

"What did your granny say to that?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"She didn't say anything, she just gave me a hiding. My back was welted for days afterwards."

"Well, your life has been really colorful, Sir," said the young monk.

"Yes, it gives life a little zest, I guess. There's another funny story that comes to mind, about sleep walking."

"Who walked in their sleep? Was it you or your Granny?" asked Merchant Seng.

"Me. Before I went to sleep I was worrying about there being no water in the big water jar, and next day having to make sure I got up and hauled water early. When I went to sleep I started walking. The neighbors said that I started hauling water from four in the morning. They said they saw me fetching water and taking it up into the house. I was really puzzled. How could a person who is asleep carry buckets to the pond? And then walk up the steps of the house? They said I just kept fetching water. If any body spoke to me I didn't answer. How could I? I was asleep, right?" he asked Phra Buahyao.

"Right, Sir. Did they tell you what they said to you?"

"They said they shouted out to me, 'Hey kid, what's got into you? Fetching water at four in the morning!' I didn't answer, when I finished fetching the water I just went back to bed."

"And did you get up and cook the rice?"

"I didn't get up because Granny didn't wake me, she wasn't home. She had gone to a festival in the northern part of the village. When I woke in the morning I got a fright. What's this? The water jars are full, all twenty of them! Even the rice jar is full of water! The rice was floating!"

"So you got another hiding?" Phra Buahyao anticipated, but this time the Phra Khru said smugly, "No, this time I got away with it, because when Granny got back from the northern part of the village she said, 'Child, who's soaked the rice?' I said, 'I walked in my sleep and hauled water into the rice jar.' I was afraid I'd get another hiding, but instead she praised me. 'Er, that's good. In the northern part of the village they're making noodles. You can take this rice and give it to them for noodles, quickly.'"

The bell sounded for the midday meal. Phra Buahyao bowed to his preceptor three times and rose to go to the eating hall. The Phra Khru said to Merchant Seng, "Please go and have something to eat. You can come

back and chat afterwards. Somchai, go and invite the taxi driver also," he ordered. Then he went up to the upstairs of his kuti to continue writing his meditation manual.



Chapter 36

After the midday meal Phra Buahyao went back to the Phra.Khru's kuti. A young civil servant, aged no more than thirty, was sitting waiting there. Phra Buahyao guessed that he must have been a government official because he was wearing the gray suit and epaulets typical of them. He bowed to Phra Buahyao three times and said, "Venerable Brother, do you live at this Wat or have you come from somewhere else?"

"I live at this Wat. And where do you come from, Patron?"

"I come from Amphur Song Pee Nong, but originally I'm from here. I've known Luang Poh for a long time."

"And what do you do there, at Amphur ... which Amphur is it again?"

"Amphur Song Pee Nong, in Suphanburi. I am the Assistant District Commissioner there."

"Oh."

Merchant Seng had finished his meal and walked back to the kuti with his taxi driver. They both bowed to Phra Buahyao, so the young monk took the opportunity to introduce the three of them to each other. When he knew that the young man was an Assistant Commissioner, he told him about his son-in-law.

"My son-in-law is the Governor of this province. Have you ever heard of him?" He told the young man the name of his daughter's husband, and the young man said, "Yes, I know him. He used to be my boss. Is Madam Duang Suda your daughter, then?"

"Yes, it was Duang Suda who introduced me to Luang Poh and so led to my coming to practice meditation here."

"This Merchant has progressed a lot in his meditation, Assistant Commissioner," said Phra Buahyao to the young official, wanting to praise one of Luang Poh's disciples. He thought that this young Assistant Commis-

sioner must be familiar with meditation practice as he was born in the area and had known the Phra Khru for a long time. He didn't know that the young man was one of those who "live close to salt but eat bland."

"Assistant Commissioner, you have probably practiced to a high level already, is that so?" he asked the young man.

"What do you mean, Venerable Brother," he asked, bewildered.

"I'm talking about Dhamma Practice. You've been in close contact with Luang Poh, so you must have done some practice, mustn't you?"

"No, not me, Venerable Brother. To tell you the truth I'm not interested in such things. What fun is there in meditation?" Since he answered in such a way, Phra Buahyao had no further questions to ask him, afraid that he might be offended by them. Just then the Phra Khru came down from upstairs. The people waiting all paid their respects with the triple prostration.

"Greetings, what brings you here, Assistant Commissioner?" he began.

"I wanted to ask you to pick an auspicious date for my wedding, Sir," said the young official.

"Who's the bride," he asked.

"She's a star of a *ligae* show," the young man said, beaming with pride at the lady he was to marry. To the Phra Khru, it sounded like a great mismatch. An Assistant Commissioner marrying a star of a traveling theater—how could it possibly be right? Or are they linked by some past karmic connection? He used his perceiving and found that these two could not possibly be successfully married. If they were, they would be separated even before the rice pot got black, so he said:

"What made you decide to get married to a *ligae* star, then? I reckon it won't be a good match. You have nothing in common at all." The young official became annoyed at Luang Poh's words, and began to lose his mindfulness so that his eyes and ears were closed. He said to the Phra Khru, "What? Luang Poh, we love each other. She's really beautiful, Luang Poh, her body and her face are so pretty. She dances beautifully, her voice is sweet. All the young men are vying for her, but she wouldn't take any of them, she chose me."

"Right! It's because of this that it will be impossible for you to live together. As soon as you are married you'll be so jealous of her that you won't let her go and act in the *ligae* any more. At first she will obey you, but as time goes on she will get bored staying at home, and she will run off to play in the *ligae* plays again. Then you will argue. In the end you will

have to separate. Don't marry her. Believe me, this lady is not your proper partner in this life. The lady who will share in your life must be a teacher."

"But I've made up my mind already, Luang Poh. I love this lady and I'm determined to marry her, no matter what," the young official said firmly. He mistook infatuation for love.

"That means you don't believe what I've told you. Don't marry her, I beg you. I only have your best interests in mind," said the Phra Khru.

"I beg you, too, Luang Poh, please don't try to prevent me. I would have no happiness for the rest of my life if I don't marry her," said the smitten man.

"In that case have it your way. It's your own karma. I've tried to help you. If you don't believe me, that's all right, but if you want me to pick an auspicious date for you, I can't, because I see what's going to happen. I'm sorry, I can't comply with your wishes."

At this, the man lost all his patience, and said vehemently, "I'm really sorry, Luang Poh. I'm sorry that I've mistakenly respected you all this time, when even in such a simple matter you can't help me. Not only that, you try to discourage me as well. Never mind, I'd like to announce right here that from this day on I no longer respect Luang Poh, and I'll never come back to this Wat again." So saying, he got up and left without taking his leave. The Phra Khru said nothing. He wasn't angered at the man's behavior, because he knew that "all beings must fare according to their karma."

"Such a shame. He has a pleasant appearance and a good position, but his manners are atrocious," said the taxi driver.

"Don't worry yourself about him, he has made this karma, it must be this way. If he still doesn't mend his ways even when I warn him, I can be no help to him. Some kinds of karma can be changed, but he won't change."

"I used to think, Luang Poh," said the taxi driver, "that karma can't be changed. That is, if someone is a thief he will always be a thief because he was born under the sign of a thief, but now I know that such is not always the case." He thought for a moment whether he should say more, but when he reflected that a bad man who comes good is worthy of praise, he decided to come out with it.

"Take me for instance. Before I used to make a living in dishonest ways, but I've changed my ways because of this merchant. Now I dare to say in full confidence that I am a good person. At least I don't bother anybody else. And I feel much happier than I used to be since I gave up my bad ways."

"Is that so? I give you my blessings. Excuse me, what kind of profes-

sion did you use to have?"

"I didn't have any profession as such, I liked to gamble, and I had debts up to my ears. The merchant was my creditor. As he pressed more and more for payment of his loans, I gathered together some friends to go and rob his house. I felt really vindictive, I intended to kill the merchant and his wife in order to rid myself of the debts. But somehow when I tried to shoot them I couldn't. They were both sitting with closed eyes, I shot into them, intending to spray them with M 16 bullets, but the gun wouldn't go off.

"I got caught, but I only had to go to prison for three months because the merchant said he couldn't remember the faces of the men who robbed him. I was so impressed by his kindness that I determined to give up my bad ways, and I have given them up," the man said, tears welling in his eyes.

The Phra Khru comforted him, "Never mind, you're finished with that misery, from now on you will meet only with prosperity and happiness. I give you my blessing and encouragement."

The forty year old man bowed to him three times, thankful for his blessing. "I am indebted to the merchant's kindness. If he had put me in jail I would never have had a chance to turn over a new leaf. Now I try to serve him as much and whenever I can."

"Sukh is very good to me, Luang Poh. He wasn't going to take any money for this ride, and I had to insist for a long time before he would agree," said Merchant Seng.

"It's because the merchant was good to me first, Luang Poh, so I wanted to repay his goodness, but he wouldn't accept it. Even when I offered just to take enough money for petrol, two hundred baht, he added another hundred," said Sukh.

"So both of you are good. Good people tend to meet good people, don't you agree, Buahyao?"

"Yes, I agree," said the young monk, then he asked, "Luang Poh, it seems that of the people coming to this Wat there are both Chinese and Thai. The Thai people usually come and ask you to assuage their sufferings, to solve their problems, and they aren't generally interested in meditation. Some people have known you for a long time but have never practiced meditation, like Khum, or the Assistant Commissioner just now. And I feel that you like Chinese people more than Thai people, is that true?"

"You're saying I'm biased?"

"Well, are you biased?" his pupil taunted.

"I don't think I'm biased. Whoever does good I praise, whoever does bad I feel sorry for. But it is strange, as you say, that most of the people who come to practice meditation are Chinese. I really like Chinese people, Merchant. Do you want to know why?" he asked the merchant.

"Yes, I'd like to know, Sir. If it isn't too much trouble I'd like to hear about it" said the old man shyly.

The Phra Khru began, "Why I love Chinese people so much is, one, I like their diligence in making a living; another reason is that I made a lot of karma with Chinese people when I was a young boy, so now I have to love them to absolve myself of that karma. But that doesn't mean I don't like Thais, Buahyao, don't misunderstand me."

"Yes, Sir, now I understand, and I know also that you do not hate Vietnamese people," said Buahyao.

"What kind of karma did you make with Chinese people, Luang Poh," asked Sukh the taxi driver.

"Many kinds, many kinds. When I was a boy I liked to try their patience."

"How did you do that?"

"I made a point of haggling the price when I bought things from them. One old man, for instance, sold clothes in the market. I pretended to haggle the price with him, but he didn't get angry. If it was a Thai shop I would have been abused and thrown out of the shop for certain, because Thai people are proud and don't have much patience.

"Thai shops tend to have a Nang Gwak statue in front but in spite of it they don't sell well. The Chinese people don't need a Nang Gwak statue, but they sell so well they barely make the goods in time. Do you believe it? The very same goods in a Thai shop selling for five baht will be sold in a Chinese shop for six baht. The customers know, but still they'll go and buy it at a Chinese shop. The Thai shops, even with their Nang Gwak statues, and selling cheaper, don't sell so well. Isn't it strange?"

"Why is that?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"Because Chinese people smile and are friendly, while the Thais wear faces like the hand of the Nang Gwak. Who would want to go into their shop?" Sukh and Merchant Seng laughed as the Phra Khru mimicked the actions he spoke of.

"I tried to trick that Chinese merchant in the market many times, but he always managed to get out of it. For instance, one day I bought a shirt, then the next day I went back and asked to change it. I said, 'Old man, I want to change this shirt. I can't wear it, it's too small.' He said, (the Phra

Khru imitated the Chinese accent) 'Never mind, never mind, you wash this shirt, it stretch.' So I had to go back home. He wouldn't change it for me. Next day I went back there and said, 'Old man, I want to change this shirt.' He asked, 'Why?' I said, 'It's too big.' He said, 'Never mind, never mind, the shirts in my shop shrink when they're washed.' So he refused to change it. I was at a loss what to say to him then."

He stopped for a moment, then continued, "There was one man with whom I made heavier karma than the others. His name was Bok. I used to call him 'Bok the Chinaman.'" As he was talking, Merchant Seng gave a start, but the Phra Khru didn't see it, and continued his story.

"During the second world war the people up country were driven out of the areas where there were soldiers. Bok the Chinaman was driven from Lopburi to the Pak Bang market. He went around buying bottles and metal from the householders to sell. Sometimes he would give rice cakes in exchange for them. At that time I was eleven or twelve years old. I used to like stealing his rice cakes and eating them, and I'd call out to him 'Crazy Chinaman, Crazy Chinaman.' Sometimes I'd tease him with a song, 'Bok the Chinaman fell in the water and drowned, His wife cried for Bok the Chinaman.' He didn't get angry, he just smiled. He said to me, 'Ahtee, you can abuse me, that's all right, I'm not angry, but I'm going to get your money no matter what.' That's what he said."

"And did he get it?" Merchant Seng asked. He was beginning to wonder if this "Bok the Chinaman" that the Phra Khru was talking about was indeed his younger brother or not. He had to listen to the whole story first.

"Yes he did. When he wasn't off guard and I couldn't steal anything, I had to buy something. But even then I cheated him. He sold his cakes for twelve and a half *satang* (one *feuang*) a pack. I'd pretend to buy one packet, but I'd actually pick up two. I tricked him like this all the time until he changed from buying bottles to selling pork. Then I went to steal his pork."

"And were you ever caught by him?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"If I got caught I would have been a disgrace to my reputation! The old man had a pair of wicker baskets. His carrying pole was like the club the scouts use, only completely black. He had carried with it until it had gone all shiny. He cut up the pork and laid it out in lots, one kilogram each. He would stand and sell it at the boat landing. While he was getting pork for another customer, I snuck up behind and took some of the pork he had piled up, stuffed it under my armpit and dived into the water and only came up on the other side, where my house was. I put the pork in the food cupboard and then dived back in to swim to the other side to try to get

another kilogram.

"When I came up on the other side, he was complaining with his customer that one kilo his pork had disappeared. The customer had seen me snatching the pork and diving into the water, but he took my side and said that the pork just fell into the water. Bok the Chinaman said, 'It can't be. Someone must've stolen it. If it really fell into the water it should be floating.' The other man said, 'It wouldn't float, pork meat doesn't float, only the fat floats.' The old man then started putting more fat in his lots, less meat, and his customers began to get fatty pork from him from that day on, all because of me."

"And did he ever show signs of suspecting you?" asked Sukh.

"He probably suspected me, but there were no witnesses, so he couldn't accuse me of anything. I played all sorts of tricks on him. Whenever I saw him I'd say 'Crazy Chinaman, go away, go away, get out of here.' He'd just smile and say, 'Little one, today you call me "Crazy Chinaman" but later on you may have to call me "Father." Remember this, huh?' I said why should I call him that? He said 'Sure you will, one day you'll have to call me that because I have five daughters. You'll have to come and ask me if you want one, and one day you'll have to call me "Father.'" That's what he said. And it was true, just as he said. I had to call him 'Father' to repay my karmic debt."

"Did you fall in love with one of his daughters?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"No, but his daughters were part of the reason I had to call Bok the Chinaman 'Father.' You see, once the daughters had grown into young ladies, they got married off to people of good position, and they helped their father in his work until he became quiet wealthy. Eventually he had enough money to set up a jewelry shop in Yowaraht."

Now merchant Seng was 100% sure that the man the Phra Khru was talking about was indeed his own younger brother, but it didn't seem the right time to come out and say it, so he decided to wait until he had finished his story.

"It's a small world, all right, merchant. Once he had moved to Bangkok, I didn't meet him for ten years, even though in those later years I had gone to study in Bangkok. Colonel Luang Dhara, who was my grandfather, took me to Bangkok and left me with Chief Marshall Phibul Songkram, who wanted me to study in the police academy.

"While I was with him, I studied music. I was a student of Luang Pradit Phyroh. But it turned out I didn't like studying to be a policeman, it didn't suit me, so I came back home. In 1948 I ordained as a monk at Wat

Prohmburi.

"I had been ordained for five Rains Retreats when the Abbot ordered me to come to Bangkok to raise money for his Uposatha Hall. I went with an attendant to meet Chief Marshall Phibul Songkram, and he donated five thousand baht. Luang Pradit Phyroh donated two thousand. The officials who were close to the Chief Marshall, who was then the Prime Minister, added a hundred or two each, so that eventually I had tens of thousands of baht.

"The day I was to leave an official who was part of Queen Ramphai Phannee's (the Queen of King Rama VII) retinue came to invite me to see her. Her Majesty offered five thousand of her own funds. I was getting ready to come back, and many people were going to see me off. Some of them wanted to buy some gold, so they invited me to go with them to Yowarath to buy some gold in one of the shops there. I was waiting outside the shop when the old Chinese man who owned the shop came out and invited me to sit inside to have some tea. He asked where I was from.

"As soon as I said I was from Wat Prohmburi he told me he had once lived at the Pak Bang market. Then I got a start. He told me about what had happened since he left the area when they evacuated all foreign residents from the military areas, and had come to buy bottles, sell pork and eventually sell gold in Bangkok. He told how his life in Pak Bang market had been really rough. He had to carry things to sell until his shoulders were all calused. Then he told one of his daughters to go and fetch the basket and carrying pole he had used to show us. I remembered it immediately. He had put gold leaf on it, it was all golden. I asked him if he had ever been harassed by people. He told me that there was one delinquent boy who always abused him and called him 'Crazy Chinaman' and stole his rice cakes. When he turned to selling pork the boy had stolen his pork as well.

"Listening to him, I came out in goose bumps. I was just wondering whether or not to tell him about it when he asked me, 'Why have you come to Bangkok?' When I told him I had come to raise funds for an Uposatha hall, he walked to a drawer at his desk and took out two thousand baht. He said he wanted to join in the merit making. I put the money in my bag as quickly as I could, afraid he would take it back, then confessed to him: 'Father, I ask your forgiveness. That delinquent boy who stole for you and called you "Crazy Chinaman" was I myself.' When he heard that he just stood there gaping. I hastened to add, 'Father, please forgive me. Now I'm a monk, I hope you won't ask for the money back.' Once he had recovered from his shock, he said to me, 'You don't have to call me "Father," you can

call me Bok the Chinaman, or "Crazy Chinaman" like you used to, I'm not angry at you, and I don't want the money back. But I would just like to ask you one thing.' I said 'What do you want from me?' Do you know what he wanted Merchant?" he asked Merchant Seng.

"No, I don't know," the elderly man replied.

"Was he asking you to disrobe to marry one of his daughters?" anticipated Phra Buahyao.


"Hm, if that was the case it would have been all right, but he didn't ask that at all. He said to me, 'You have ordained as a monk, that's good. I want to ask you to stay on as a monk your whole life. Don't disrobe and abuse Chinese people again.' That's what he said. Those words really bit into my heart. I almost gave him the money back."

"And did you give it back?" asked Sukh.

"Why should I give it back? He had intended to make merit with it."

They were quiet for a moment when Seng the merchant said, "Luang Poh, please don't be upset but I'd like to inform you about some facts."

"What facts do you want to tell me about, merchant, go ahead. I'll try not to get a shock." Having gotten permission, the elderly man spoke up, "Bok the Chinaman that you just told us about is my own younger brother who we carried over with us from China." The Phra Khru had a feeling much like the day the tent pole smashed into his face. He called out to Somchai, "Where are you Somchai, brew up some tonic powder, I feel I'm going to faint."



Chapter 37

Luang Poh, can one spread thoughts of loving kindness to people who are still alive?" asked Phra Buahyao.
"Who is this 'person who is still alive' you have in mind?" responded the Phra Khru, pretending not to understand the question. He wasn't expecting such a bland question from his student.

"A person who is still alive is one who is not dead, and a dead person is one who is not alive, Sir." Seeing his Ajahn bantering, he decided to do some himself.

"Your answer exceeds my question, Buahyao. I asked you to explain only the person who is still alive, but you've explained dead people as well, even though I didn't ask about them."

"I knew that Luang Poh would ask me another question, so I answered in advance to save time."

"So you've attained 'perceiving' then, have you? May I congratulate you," he taunted.

"I'm not so talented, Luang Poh, that is, now I'm not so talented, but I don't know about in the future," the student said conceitedly.

"So, even now when you're not talented you're as gifted as this. How clever will you be when you're talented?" the Ajahn said, praising his future achievements.

"I simply guessed your thoughts correctly," said the student. "I've been tricked so often I've gotten used to it, now I know how to get out of your traps."

"Oh, so you say I play tricks on you, mm? Are you accusing me of being an adult who picks on children?"

"No I don't 'accuse' you of anything, Sir, it's just that you really are like that. I don't like to put people down without justification. If you don't

believe me just ask me. Luang Poh has made fun of me every chance you get," said Buahyao, taking the opportunity to get his own back. "Even when the chance doesn't arise you still make fun of me."

"Well, if I didn't make fun of you, who would I make fun of?"

"See what I mean?" said his accuser, "You confess!"

"Seeing I've confessed that means my punishment must be reduced by half, doesn't it?"

"I guess so, Sir."

"'Guess' isn't good enough. In legal jingo you have to say things very precisely."

"I never learned law."

"I didn't learn it either, but I know about it. Some people say I knew about it since before I was born," said the Ajahn, taking the opportunity to do some boasting himself.

"And this 'some people,' are they trustworthy? How much can they be believed?"

"I don't know either, but you've got to believe them."

"All right, Sir, we'll settle that your sentence is reduced by half because you've confessed," summarized the student.

"Then since I only had half a sentence, and now it's reduced a half, that means there's none left, so we're evens."

Phra Buahyao sensed that things weren't going very productively. If he just sat and swapped this drivel with his teacher he would be wasting his time, so he came back to his original question.

"Gosh, Luang Poh, I only asked a little but you've thrown in kilos of free gifts."

"Don't you like free gifts? These days there always has to be a free gift. You buy a toothpick and they throw in a coffin, that sort of thing."

"But I don't like free gifts. Goods that have free gifts must be of inferior quality. If they were really good they wouldn't need a free gift, people would be clamoring to buy them. Isn't that true, Luang Poh?"

"You could say it's true, or you could say it's not true," he said, playing on his words. He had been bearing the brunt of other people's burdens for a long time, it was good to have Phra Buahyao around to add some comic relief.

"In that case, just take it that it's true. I'm a true person. Anyway, Sir, can you answer my question now? I asked you whether it was possible to spread thoughts of loving kindness to people who were still alive." The young man repeated his question, anticipating the Phra Khru's inevitable

question: "What was your question?"

Seeing that his student seemed sincerely bent on getting an answer, the Ajahn said, "Of course you can, why not?"

"In that case, I'd like to spread thoughts of loving kindness to my mother and her husband. Do you think they will receive it?"

The Phra Khru looked at his student and sized him up—"The battery's fully charged, it's not leaking. He's ready to use his mental energy in a useful way"—so he said

"Sure you can. Your practice has progressed sufficiently. You may not have attained 'perceiving,' but you are capable of spreading thoughts of loving kindness to others."

Phra Buahyao was so happy he forgot to note "pleasant feeling," so his preceptor warned him, "Buahyao. Why don't you note 'pleasant feeling'?" The young monk did as instructed. Once he had suppressed his delight, he said, "The past two or three days, I don't know why, but I keep thinking about my mother. I don't know whether she is well or not. I wrote a letter and disposed of it just before new year, but there's been no reply. Do you think she received it?"

"Well, you wrote it and just disposed of it, how could she possibly receive it? You have to send it by mail if you want someone to receive it," said the Phra Khru, not yet satiated with the banter.

"Do you think she received it?" repeated Buahyao, not bothering to continue the banter. He wanted his preceptor to use his perceiving to look into the matter for him.

"Sure she received it," said the Phra Khru, falling into his student's trap. In fact Phra Buahyao wasn't intending to trap his preceptor, but since the chance had come his way he couldn't let it pass by unheeded. Besides, he had the answer he wanted so he was ready to continue the banter again.

"Hey, Luang Poh, you just said that if I just disposed of the letter it wouldn't get there, that I had to send it by mail. So how come my mother received it, since I just disposed of it?"

"Mm, that's true. I helped her to receive it," said the Phra Khru, speaking for merit, but his student got serious again.

"In that case, Luang Poh, tonight at eight o'clock I will sit in meditation and spread thoughts of loving kindness to my mother and her husband. I'll sit until eight o'clock the next morning."

"Can you sit that long? Twelve hours?"

"Yes, I can, I've done it before."

"That's really good, I give you my blessings. But you weren't just sit-

ting sleeping, were you?" asked the preceptor doubtfully.

"I wasn't sleeping, Sir, I had mindfulness all through the sitting. When I breathed in I knew, when I breathed out I knew, when the abdomen rose I knew, when it fell I knew, when there was pain I noted it, when I broke wind I noted it every time," answered the student, getting a little carried away with his answer. The preceptor was just about to tell him to stop when his brief monologue came to an end.

"Next time you don't have to explain in such detail. I know you can really do it. Just keep up the practice, you will be able to repay all your karmic debts." At the words 'repay your karmic debts,' Phra Buahyao's hair stood on end, so he noted "hair standing on end" with well-trained mindfulness.

"Luang Poh, is it all right not to walk meditation before I start sitting? Or should I walk for an hour or so before sitting?"

"It's not necessary to walk. If you're not sitting for a long time you should walk first, but once you have developed some proficiency in the practice you can organize it your own way. You may just walk, or just sit, or walk and sit alternately. The important thing is to have good mindfulness the whole time."

"Yes, sir. In that case I will start tonight. Today is the day before the observance day, the seventh day of the waxing moon. Tomorrow is the observance day. I'll sit from today until tomorrow."

"When do you think you will be sitting?" the Phra Khru asked, even though his student had just told him.

"At eight o'clock tonight, on the dot, going through till eight o'clock tomorrow morning," said Phra Buahyao. Then, realizing that tomorrow, being an observance day, he would have to participate in the Uposatha ceremony at four in the morning, he asked his preceptor, "Luang Poh, is it all right if I don't participate in the Uposatha ceremony tomorrow morning? I will still be in meditation."

"Yes, that's all right, you are practicing just the same, except that you won't be practicing with other people. It's not against the rules. When you have sat for the whole twelve hours, pull your mind out of *samadhi* first, then spread thoughts of loving kindness and share the merits of your action to them. You understand this, don't you?"

"Yes, Sir, I understand. Thank you most highly for your kindness to me throughout. It's my great fortune to have met a preceptor as good as Luang Poh," he said, bowing down in recognition of his indebtedness.

"Luang Poh, can we spread loving kindness across continents?" asked

Phra Buahyao.

"Yes, but the sender must have very strong concentration. You have to practice very ardently. There have been cases of people doing this, in fact one man came and did just that at this temple."

"Who was it, is he still here?" he was thinking of Phra Maha Boon, it must be him.

"He doesn't live here any more. He was a Norwegian who came to ordain and practice here. He practiced very strictly so that he was able to spread the merits of his actions to his father, mother and Grandfather living Norway. If you want to know about it one day I'll tell you."

"In that case, the lay man and his family who came to practice and send thoughts of goodwill to their son in America were probably successful."

Speaking of that layman reminded the Phra Khru, so he used his "perceiving" and looked into the matter, then said, "Yes, it was successful. Now the son has gone to the cemetery. The lay man and his wife went to collect the body in America just this last week."

"That's not very good, Sir, spreading thoughts of loving kindness and making someone die! If they hadn't spread thoughts of loving kindness he may still be alive."

"It's a good thing, Buahyao, why not? What happiness does a drug addict have? He died, he's finished with his bad karma, and he will be reborn in a better position. In any case, drug addicts are short-lived. Dying while receiving merits and dying without them—which is better? Think it out for yourself."

"But I don't know if his father and mother think the same way that Luang Poh and I think."

"They understand. Those who practice understand the nature of life better than those who don't. I already intimated to them what would happen. Besides, the death of the son will save the life of the father. That lay man has determined to give up selling drugs. He knows that anybody who gets involved with these things gets addicted and quickly dies, all of them."

"Why do they die?"

"Blast fever," said the preceptor dryly.

"Is it really that deadly, this 'blast fever'? Is there no medicine for it?" asked the young monk doltishly.

"Buahyao."

"Sir?"

"Do you really not know or are you just pretending not to know? You

mean to tell me that you really don't know what blast fever is?"

"I really don't know, Sir. What does it mean?"

"Even if you paid me I wouldn't tell you," said the preceptor, taking the opportunity to taunt him.

"And what about if I don't pay you? I haven't got any money, anyway."

"Why do you want to know?"

"Just in case you catch it, I'll know what to tell the doctor."

"No need, I can guarantee you that I won't be dying from 'blast fever,' for sure. I guarantee it," said the teacher firmly.

"So what will Luang Poh be dying of?" As soon as he said it he regretted it, so he bowed down to his preceptor and said, "I beg your forgiveness, Luang Poh. I didn't mean to be so rude, my mouth just ran away with me. Please don't be offended at me, I'm just a lout, I say things off the top of my head with no consideration of time and place," said the young monk, berating himself at length. His preceptor was in fact not at all angry. He said blandly, "Do you want to know what I will be dying of? Listen, Buahyao, and remember my words. I haven't told anybody about this, you are the first one to know." He was still for a moment, then, with voice and behavior completely at ease, he said, "I will be killed in a car accident. You can go back and write this down in a notebook: on the 14th of October, 1978, at 12:45 p.m., Phra Khru Charoen will be killed in a road accident."

If Phra Buahyao could see himself in a mirror right at that moment he would have seen that his face was drained, pale and white. His preceptor's words had given him a fright. Only four or five years from now the man who was the light in his life would be leaving this world. The young monk was stricken with unfold sorrow, and had to note to himself, "sorrow, sorrow" for quite some time until he was able to bring himself back to a normal state of mind, then he asked his preceptor, "Why does it have to be like that, Luang Poh, why?"

"It will happen according to causes and conditions, Buahyao. These causes and conditions are karma. You don't have to go pale over it, I beg you. I'm the one who is going to die, not you. You can stop making your face pale like that," he said, still in teasing mood.

"Gosh, Luang Poh, you must have a chisel-face, you're still calm. I'm not putting on the pale face, it just happened by itself, because I don't want you to die. If it were possible for me to die in your place, I'd gladly do so. Please let me repay your kindness by dying in your place," said Phra Buahyao. He was speaking sincerely from his own heart, but his listener

just thought to himself how much his student spoke like one who has never practiced Dhamma before.

"Such a pity, you've made the effort to practice many months now. I thought you'd have progressed to some level or other, but in fact you haven't gotten anywhere, Buahyao," he said, sighing.

"Are you talking about me, Luang Poh? Who are you talking about?" said his student, puzzled at his words.

"Who am I talking to?"

"You're talking to me. Phra Khru Charoen is talking to Phra Buahyao. You haven't even answered my question but you've gotten mixed up already!"

"Me, mixed up? I think you're wrong. The one who is mixed up is you, who else? You've practiced meditation for so many months, and yet you come out and say you want to die in my place. You're so ignorant, so lacking in understanding about the law of karma. If we could make karma for each other, you wouldn't have to come and eat tomorrow, I could eat in your place and let you be the one who is full. Do you want to try that?"

"How could that be, Luang Poh? Whoever eats is the one who is satiated. How could someone else be satisfied in their place?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"That's how it must be, all right. In the same way, it is impossible for you to die in my place. I'm the one who made the karma, I'm the one who must receive the results."

"But I've only seen you making good karma, Luang Poh. You teach people to be good and help them with your kindness without any thought of reward. You've never taken any interest in your own personal karma, so why should you meet with such terrible misfortune? Or is it the results of your good karma? I don't understand why the world must be such an unfair place. I really don't, Luang Poh," Phra Buahyao blurted out.

"It's not like that, Buahyao, don't misunderstand. Remember that good actions must always lead to good results, bad actions lead to bad results. It may be true that people have only seen me doing good actions, but they haven't seen the bad actions I have done."

"You mean behind people's backs you secretly do bad things? It's impossible, no matter what, I don't believe it. Luang Poh is definitely not such a person."

"What kind of person? One who smiles on the front and deceives behind his back? You think that I would be like that?"

"No I don't think so. I don't think so, I've never thought so and I will

never think so."

"Buahyao, how long have you known me?"

"Four months, Sir."

"In only four months you think you can be sure that I've never made bad karma?"

"Never mind four months, even if I only knew you for four days I would be sure that you would never make bad karma. Even though I haven't attained 'perceiving' I can still see."

"All right, seeing as you're so sure, I'll tell you in order to put your mind at rest and relieve you of your doubts. I will have my neck broken in an automobile accident because of my past bad karma. I've made a lot of bad karma, Buahyao my friend," he said soberly.

"In your past life?"

"In this life. Do you know? When I was a young boy, twelve or thirteen years old, I was really delinquent. They called me the Great Bandit all over the village. It was at that time that I made a lot of bad karma for which I have to sit and pay right up to the present day."

"You said that you would be involved in a car accident and your neck broken—for what karma is that, Sir?" asked his student eagerly.

"Breaking birds' necks. I've broken hundreds of birds' necks, so I have to pay the consequences. It's good, I'll pay up my debts once and for all." It was only then that Phra Buahyao understood how straight down the line was the law of karma. Whoever made karma would receive fruits accordingly. Whether one was rich or poor one could not flee the results of one's own karma. Then he thought of his own karma, having killed so many cattle.

"Luang Poh, and when will I have to pay my karmic debts? Before or after Luang Poh?"

"Do you want to pay them before or after?"

"Before: once you have died, who would be there to help me?"

"Oh, so your expressions of sorrow are simply because you are worried about yourself, is that it? I thought you were worried about me, but in fact you are only worried about yourself!" he said smiling.

Phra Buahyao felt a little more relaxed, and said, "But you have taught me that 'No matter how far a person may search, no-one will he will find that he loves more than himself.' You did say that didn't you?"

"I didn't say it, I simply quoted the Buddha's words for you. Now then, now then, let's just leave it that you love yourself most of all."

"And what about you, Luang Poh, who do you love most of all?" re-

torted his student.

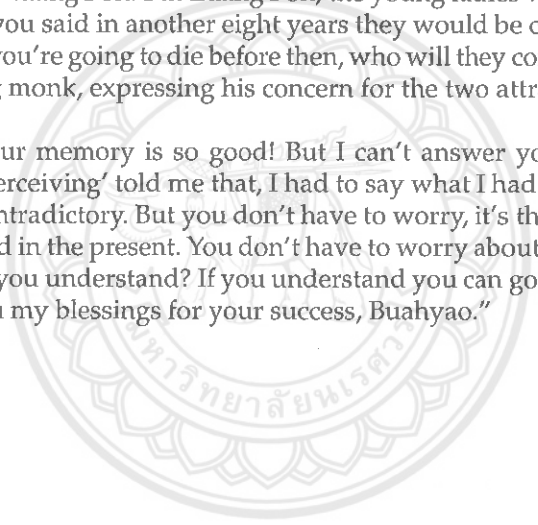
"I love myself most of all, just the same. I'm a student of the Buddha, I have to believe what he says. Everybody loves themselves most of all, all of them. So if anybody tells you they love you more than they love themselves, you can know that they're lying."

"That's right. There's a story they tell about a pair of lovers sitting under a coconut tree. The man tells the woman that he loves her so much he would die for her, but she says she wouldn't believe it if he paid her. Just at that moment a coconut falls from the tree and the man immediately puts his hands over his own head. So the woman found out his lie."

"That's right. And don't you go round telling lies like that to others."

"No way, Luang Poh. But Luang Poh, the young ladies Wonwilai and Phongphan—you said in another eight years they would be coming to see Luang Poh. If you're going to die before then, who will they come to meet?" said the young monk, expressing his concern for the two attractive young ladies.

"Why, your memory is so good! But I can't answer your question, because my 'perceiving' told me that, I had to say what I had perceived. It seems to be contradictory. But you don't have to worry, it's the future. Just keep your mind in the present. You don't have to worry about the past and the future. Do you understand? If you understand you can go back to your kuti. I give you my blessings for your success, Buahyao."



Chapter 38

Phra Buahyao withdrew from the samadhi state at eighth o'clock on the dot the next morning and directed thoughts of goodwill and dedicated the merits of his action to his mother and step father. He also made a resolve that the two people give up killing animals, their wrong livelihood, and make a living by Right Livelihood.

He could feel the mental power emanating from himself and felt strangely confident that Boorpha and Rume, her husband, would definitely receive the fruits of his good actions.

Having finished his important task, he went to bathe. He felt wonderfully light and cheerful, as he had never felt before. The power resulting from his meditation practice was so subtle and profound, only "the well-trained mind" could experience it.

It was half an hour past the time for the morning meal. He wasn't feeling hungry so he began to practice walking meditation and resolved to sit meditation till eleven o'clock, the time for the "mid-day" meal. After that he would spread thoughts of loving kindness again and dedicate the merits of his actions to his father, mother and relatives, devas, hungry ghosts and all beings in all realms in all directions in limitless number, including those he had wronged. It may just be that they would forgive him, or perhaps let him pay for his past karma more quickly—at the latest, at least, some time before his preceptor passed away in payment for his debt to the birds.

He walked for an hour before going up to his hut to sit in meditation. His mind seemed to become one-pointed quicker than ever before. He could note "rising" and "falling" very clearly and consistently. No pains or stiffness arose. He felt comfortable the whole time he sat. His mindfulness was clear so that he was able to prevent his mind from drifting into subcon-

sciousness (*bhavanga*).

In time he heard the sound of the bell for the midday meal, so he withdrew from his concentration, spread thoughts of loving kindness and dedicated the merits of his practice to the devas and all other beings, and then walked to the eating hall for the meal.

As he was walking up the steps to the eating hall, he heard someone calling him from behind, and turned to see a middle aged man kneeling on the cement surface in front of him. In his proffered hands was a tray. It was round and made of ceramic. On it were dishes of food, surrounding an almost full glass of water.

"Venerable Buahyao, I would like to show my appreciation for the good actions you have done by offering this tray into your hands. Please accept it." Phra Buahyao stood and held out his hands to receive the tray, then asked, "Where you from, patron? And how do you know me?" He had never seen the man before. His bearing seemed somehow different from other people. Even though he dressed like other people, his complexion seemed unusually fine and radiant, and a slight fragrance emanated from his body. It was a fragrance that Phra Buahyao had never before experienced.

"I live around here but I've never let anybody see me. Apart from the Phra Khru you are the only one who has seen me." His voice seemed to resound. Even though he didn't use the polite word "krup" at the end of his sentence, his speech was not unpleasant.

"Thank you very much. Please come upstairs, we can have a chat."

"No, I have to hurry back, I take my leave." He bent down and prostrated three times, then walked off toward the back gate of the monastery. Phra Buahyao thought he must have been a villager from across the other side of the river who had come across by row boat, so he decided to follow and see for himself. He placed the tray down at the head of the stairs and walked after him, following closely, but once he had gone through the gate he saw not even one person in the area. Looking down at the water there was no sign of a boat either, so he walked back to the eating hall in a state of bewilderment. He decided that after the meal he would have to go and ask the Phra Khru to ease his doubts.

Phra Buahyao picked up the tray of food at the head of the stairs and went to take his seat. He opened the lids to each of the three dishes and found that one contained plain cooked rice, the second chili sauce, the third boiled greens. They seemed to be the most simple and commonplace of village foods, except that the aroma emanating from them promised a most

delicious taste. He spooned some of the chili sauce onto some rice and with his fork took some of the greens and placed them on top of the chili sauce and put it into his mouth. He noted “chewing, chewing,” until he reached “swallowing, swallowing” and then felt completely full, even though he’d only had one mouth full. He lifted the glass to drink some water, then turned to the monk sitting next to him:

“Try some of this chili sauce and boiled greens, it’s delicious.”

“If it’s delicious then just note ‘delicious,’ don’t make a big deal out of it,” said the monk, taking the opportunity to teach him. Then he added, “On Observance days we get chicken, pork and duck to eat. Why should we bother with boiled greens? So boring!” he said. He did not sense the same delicious aroma that Phra Buahyao did. To that monk, all that was on the tray was the most ordinary dishes—chili sauce and boiled greens, which were to him most uninviting.

While they were sitting waiting for the rest of the monks to finish eating, Phra Buahyao maintained his mindfulness by noting “rising” and “falling” at his abdomen. His mind was becoming accustomed to maintaining mindfulness in all postures.

“What’s up? Doesn’t today’s food suit you? You’ve eaten so little,” said Phra Maha Boon with concern.

“Not at all. I’m full and I feel very well indeed. Won’t you try some of this, Venerable Elder Brother?” he said, passing the dishes of chili sauce and boiled greens to him. Phra Maha Boon, not wanting to offend him, took some and tried it. It was just ordinary old chili sauce and boiled greens, tasteless as ever. Phra Buahyao did not know that his experience with the meal was exclusively for him.

When he had given the blessing with the other monks after the meal, Phra Buahyao walked straight to the Phra Khru’s kuti, just as the owner of the kuti was telling the people “with faces stained with suffering” to go and have something to eat at the kitchen. He didn’t go upstairs to continue writing his book after they had gone, as he knew Phra Buahyao must come to see him.

In a moment the young monk arrived, this time in a different guise than usual. This time he was coming as one “whose face is stained with happiness.”

After prostrating three times, the young monk began, “Luang Poh, I have done everything as I told you I would.”

“Very good, may I express my appreciation,” he said, holding up his joined palms in a gesture of appreciation.

"But there is one doubt that has cropped up. I'm really not sure about it, but I know that you must definitely be able to answer it for me."

"Well, it seems you have a great deal of the hindrance of doubt, Buahyao."

"It isn't doubt as a hindrance, Luang Poh, I can't describe what kind of a doubt it is. I only know that it isn't *vicikiccha*, but I don't know what it is."

"In that case, tell me about it." Phra Buahyao proceeded to relate to him the incident of the man offering the food, relating the whole story in detail from beginning to end.

"I beg to express my appreciation," said the Phra Khru, lifting his joined palms in the gesture of appreciation. Phra Buahyao felt completely bewildered, and was just about to ask when the Phra Khru continued, "I express my appreciation, you have made more progress than any of the other monks in this monastery. Heed this well, that man who offered food to you was a deva, not a simple villager as you thought."

"Deva," echoed Phra Buahyao.

"How could that be, Luang Poh," he asked, thoroughly baffled.

"Regardless of whether it can or cannot be, it has already happened. Don't you remember what he said to you, that apart from me you are the only person who has seen him?"

"I guess it's true then. But ... what about the trays and the food left over? I didn't bring them down from the eating hall? And how can I return them to him?"

"Don't worry about them. You don't have to worry about that. Those things were created by him, he'll call them back himself."

"And why did he offer them specifically to me alone? And how come Phra Maha Boon didn't find it delicious as I did?"

"Buahyao, these things are experiences for each particular person. You don't have to go talking about this to others. I've experienced things like this countless times already, but I've never told anybody about it. The only reason I tell you about it is because you have experienced it yourself, so I'm expressing my congratulations to you."

"You mean that you eat so little and yet have energy the whole day long because you subsist on the food of devas, is that it?"

"Something like that. They call it 'divine food,' because it is more refined than human food. You have to eat a lot of human food and excrete it as feces, but one mouthful of divine food is enough to satisfy your hunger and there is no remaining roughage to become feces. The devas don't pass

feces. In heaven there are no toilets like in the human world," explained the Phra Khru.

"Have you been to see for yourself?"

"Even without going, I can see it."

"You mean you see through your 'perceiving'?"

"Yeah, whatever you want to call it. If you want to be like me you have to throw yourself into the practice, then one day you will surely succeed."

"Luang Poh, why did that deva come to offer food specifically to me and Luang Poh, why doesn't he offer it to other monks?"

"Because he is pleased with our practice. Don't forget, Buahyao, a monk who practices rightly and well is more excellent than the devas. Even the devas respect him. He offered food to you because he wanted some merit himself. In the Buddha's time the devas used to take on human appearance in order to offer food to the Arahants who had just left the state of cessation of ideation and feeling."

"They're devas and they still want merit?"

"Sure they do. That is why when we have finished our meditation practice we spread thoughts of goodwill and dedicate the merits of our practice to the devas. When they receive the merits they may repay us by offering divine food to us. When they offer the food they get merit again."

"And don't the devas practice meditation? If they want merit why don't they practice themselves instead of waiting for the merits from human beings?"

"They probably want to practice, but it's hard for them to find teachers. Besides, in the world of the devas there is only happiness and comfort, and they get attached to it. Put it this way, the atmosphere in heaven is not conducive to practicing a celibate life!"

"In that case it's better to be a human being than a deva."

"It's better in that way, but in terms of happiness and comfort the deva realm is much better. The devas have divine happiness, they can materialize what they want to their hearts' desire."

"In that case I want to be a deva, then I could eat divine food every day."

"Don't bother, Buahyao. Just be yourself, that's good enough. The path that you're walking is the Supreme Way that leads to the transcendence of the world of delusion (*samsara*). No matter how happy the life of a deva may be, they still have to die and be reborn, traveling along the wheel of delusion endlessly, and they can't choose to be reborn as devas every time."

Whenever they become heedless they'll fall into the nether realms."

"Luang Poh, are there only good devas and no bad ones?"

"There are two kinds of devas, those with right view and those with wrong view. It's just like in the human realm, there are good people and bad people. The devas who have right view are the straight devas, while those with wrong view are the crooked ones. The latter like oblations and sacrifices, they take bribes. The first group don't take bribes because they adhere to what is fair."

"So the deva who offered the food to me was of the straight type?"

"Yes, that's right. The crooked devas don't like to make merit, just like bad humans who like to make only bad karma. They don't know how to make merit and build up skillful tendencies. You could say then that there is not much difference between the devas and the humans. Right now you could even say that you are a deva, but don't get swelled up over it. Don't let it slide. Resolve to keep on practicing, and one day you may arrive at the destination." Phra Buahyao was overjoyed at these words, and had to note "feeling happy, feeling happy" for quite some time.

"Luang Poh, can I talk about this to Phra Maha Boon?" he asked.

"No you cannot. I already told you, didn't I, that this is something specifically for you, you mustn't go and tell others about it. They'll probably think you are crazy if you do. Look at me. I've eaten divine food for four or five years but I've never told anybody about it. I only told you about it, and you're the first, because you've experienced the same thing for yourself, so you will understand. Didn't you see that when you let Phra Maha Boon try some of the food he found it to be just ordinary food? That's because the deva had made up his mind to offer the food to you only. Other people would not experience it the same way you did. I beg of you, Buahyao, don't tell anybody else about this, it won't be at all useful, either to yourself or to others. Do you understand?"

"Yes I understand. But Luang Poh, if Phra Maha Boon experiences the same thing, can I tell him about what I've experienced? Can I do it then?"

"If that happens, then you can talk about it. But you have to let him experience it for himself first, because these things can't be proven to others. It isn't a public property, it's only for certain people. So if you are loose-tongued and go around telling others about it, they'll surely say you're crazy. Remember this."

"And would it be bad karma?"

"Yes it would be bad karma, both for the one who tells and the ones who are told."

born, then I'll tell you." His answer brought laughter from the people sitting there, then he said to the woman, "Whether it's a boy or a girl it's your child, eh? Just wish that he or she emerges fully intact, with the thirty-two parts, not deficient, blind or deaf, and that's good enough already. It doesn't matter whether it's a boy or a girl, just as long as when he or she grows up he or she is virtuous."

"Yes, when he gets bigger I'll teach him."

"Teach your child right now. You have to begin teaching from the time the child is in the womb. The important thing is that the parents have to set an example. If any mother just spends all her time playing cards, I guarantee the child will grow up to be a card shark. He's been observing from when he was in the womb." The laughter arose again.

"But it's true! I'm not joking. A child will only be good if it has been conditioned from the womb. Some people, as soon as they are born, say, 'Mum, put some food in the bowl for the monks.'" He imitated the sound of a child, eliciting more laughter from the audience.

"If they talk like this it means they have been good from birth. It's more a cause of concern if they say, 'Mum, buy me some high front shoes! That means they like to dress up, it's not a good sign.'"

"There are no high front shoes, Luang Poh, only high heels," retorted the lady.

"Not high heels. High front shoes are shoes that make the wearer's face high up. Her face is raised up in the air," he made a face in imitation, and everybody laughed.

"But once she take the shoes off her face falls down. This is 'high front shoes.' Have you ever worn them?" he asked an elderly lady sitting at the back of the group.

"Yes, I have, when I was young. But now I can't wear them, my condition is not conducive to them," she answered. She had come to ask for a consecrated bel fruit for her daughter.

Chapter 39

Once the problem of the pregnancies had been dealt with, there were the problems of the abortions. The Phra Khru had to give consultation on every kind of problem free of charge. "Loving kindness is the quality that supports the world" is a verse that he constantly bore in mind. Whenever he got tired or discouraged, he would think of the verse to energize his mind and make it glad to continue helping people.

A young woman of about twenty years of age crept toward the Phra Khru and spoke so softly so that nobody else could hear. The problem she had for the Phra Khru today was embarrassing, not for other people's ears.

"Luang Poh, I haven't been able to sleep for days now, I have nightmares every night."

"So, if you can't sleep how do you manage to have nightmares? Or do you dream while you're awake? If that's the case how can you call it dreaming? You say strange things." He spoke in a normal voice as he didn't yet see any reason to lower it. The young woman made a face and corrected herself, "I mean I don't sleep the whole night, I keep waking up and drifting off. But whenever I do drop off I have bad dreams and wake with a start. It's been like this for many nights now. Luang Poh, please help me," said the woman, also using her normal tone. She would save her whispers for the "secret" parts.

"How do you want me to help you?"

"Please help me to sleep soundly and not have any nightmares. I tried taking tranquilizers, but they only worked at first. They say it's dangerous to take them regularly, that's why I have come to seek shelter in your virtue."

"And these nightmares, what are they about?"

"I dream that a little boy comes and attacks me. Sometimes he stran-

gles me, sometimes he cuts off my arms and legs, sometimes he plucks out my eyes. It's dreadful."

The Phra Khru used his "perceiving" and found that this young woman had just had an abortion. The child's spirit's desire for revenge was so strong he wanted to kill her. Her sleeplessness and bad dreams were results of karma in this life, giving fruition visibly. Such karma is called *ditthadhamma vedaniya kamma*. Knowing her karma, the Phra Khru asked, "Well, have you ever harmed any children? What I have perceived is that there is a spirit of a young boy who wants to kill you, because you have made some bad karma with him." At these words the young woman burst into tears. She suddenly feared for her life and blurted out in a whisper,

"I had an abortion, Luang Poh. I almost died having it. I've suffered from nightmares ever since. Please help me."

"The child who came out was a boy, right?" he asked, just as softly.

"Yes, it seemed he didn't want to come out, that's how I felt."

"Of course. He wanted to be born, but you didn't want him to be born." The young woman sobbed louder, and, while still sobbing, said, "I wanted him, but ... but ... my boyfriend wouldn't accept responsibility for the child. I was afraid I'd be shamed in front of the neighbors for having a fatherless child. That's why I decided to have an abortion."

"If he doesn't accept responsibility that's his business, but since you have made the karma you have to accept the responsibility yourself. If you have to be shamed then so it must be, it's still better than doing what you did. You know, that child really hates you."

"Isn't there any way you can help me at all, Luang Poh? Please help me," she begged. The Phra Khru sat still for a moment and then said, "I can help, but not much. The one who can help you most of all is you yourself. But can you do as I say?"

"I can do it, just tell me what to do, I'll do anything," she said obediently.

"That's good. I want you to come and practice meditation here for fifteen days. During that time you have to practice strictly, and spread thoughts of loving kindness and dedicate the merits of your practice to him. Then he may forgive you. I'll also help you by getting in contact with his spirit."

"I can't do that, Luang Poh, I can't come because I have to work. My boss wouldn't let me take time off."

"But just now you said you would do anything, now you've changed your mind. What about you saying that you'd do whatever I said," he said

flatly, not angry or upset, because he was used to the permutations of human mentality.

"Can't you help me in some other way?" she haggled.

"What kind of other way is there? Give me a hint."

"What about sprinkling some holy water, giving me a verse to recite or something like that?"

"Oh, you like phony things like that, eh? You don't like the real things, right? Take heed: if you like false things, in this life all you will meet are false things. The only love you will get will be false love. Is that what you want?"

"No, I want the real thing, and I want real love, but I've never got what I wanted, even once. Why is it, Luang Poh? Why is it?" the young woman began sobbing softly again.

"It's because you are a fickle person. I'll tell you straight like this, you can get angry, that's all right. If your mind was firm and stable you wouldn't be like this. Is what I say true or not?"

"It's true, everything you say is true. I admit it."

"You don't have to admit it, it doesn't bother me," said the Phra Khru casually.

"So are you going to sprinkle me with Holy Water?" asked the woman who had just 'admitted it,' obviously sticking to her old ideas.

"What?" the Phra Khru said evenly, "Haven't you understood a word I've been saying? I thought you just admitted it."

"Yes, I admit that what you say is true, but I am not capable of following your advice. I have to work. Please just sprinkle some Holy Water on me, or at least puff on my head to relieve me of my suffering."

"I'm sorry, miss, I can't do that, because doing that would not help to solve the problem. Your problem is not one that can be easily dealt with. Apart from the method I've recommended, there is no other." He knew that in no long time this young woman would become demented because of the karma she had committed.

"But I really don't have any time, Luang Poh. Let alone fifteen days, I couldn't even come for three days," answered the woman who loved her work more than her own life.

"Have it your way then. If you can't do it, I can't help you in any other way. And I can't tell you how much longer you will have to undergo this suffering. I can help you no more. I can't sprinkle you with consecrated water or blow on your head because I know within me that those things cannot help you. Phra Khru Charoen doesn't like to deceive people."

"In that case I'll look for another Wat, there may be another Venerable monk who can help me," she said hopefully.

"There isn't, miss, believe me. Don't waste your time," he said, trying to be helpful, but the woman retorted, "Well if you can't help me then I have to look for another Wat. I take my leave, sir," she bowed three times, rose and left indignantly.

The Phra Khru shook his head in frustration and said to the people sitting in his kuti, "See that, patrons? I tell her the truth but she refuses it. She just wants the false. How will she ever solve her problems that way? This is what they call 'solving problems by missing the point:' as the ancients used to say, like eating a mangosteen and missing the seed."

"I've only heard them say 'Solving problems at the wrong point is like eating a sapodilla fruit and eating only the seeds,'" interjected Phra Buahyao, not really meaning to be cheeky, just getting carried away through habit.

"It's the same thing anyway," countered the Phra Khru.

"Not the same, Sir. Mangosteen seeds are tasty, you can eat them, but you can't eat sapodilla seeds. Or have you eaten them, Luang Poh?" asked the student naively.

"I've never eaten them, but I say that what I said is the same in that eating mangosteens and missing the seed, and eating sapodillas and getting only the seeds, are the same: they don't realize the objective that you want," answered the teacher with the unbelievably dense disciple.

Another woman crept toward the Phra Khru and whispered to him, "Luang Poh, a doctor tells me I've got cancer in the uterus. What karma is that the result of?"

He answered in a hushed voice, "The cause of cancer in the uterus, in terms of the law of karma, is caused by two main things: one, breaking the third precept; two, having had an abortion. Which one is it for you, the first or the second?"

The woman hesitated for a moment, and eventually said, "The second. I once had an abortion, three years ago. But Luang Poh, my mother died from cancer in the uterus even though she had never broken the third precept or had an abortion. I can swear that she really didn't."

"She didn't in this life but in the previous life or another past life she must have. Without a cause, how can the result arise, true?"

"I guess so, but is there a way I can be cured? The doctors won't treat me. They say in three months I can go back to my old home." Now she broke out in tears, crying for her life.

"The doctors say that?"

“Yes, they didn’t tell me directly, but they told my older sister. Is there some way you can help?”

“Yes, but you must help yourself as well. For the three months you have left you must come and practice meditation in the monastery, practice as hard as you are physically able, and dedicate the merits of your action to your enemies and those you have wronged. If they consent to forgive you, your illness will disappear. If they don’t forgive you, at least you will die with mindfulness. Can you do that?”

“Yes, I can, I’ve come prepared with my clothes. I’d like to begin from today,” said the woman who valued her life.

“In that case I’ll have Somchai see you to the nuns quarters.” Then he called Somchai and gave him his orders. The woman’s older sister helped her to the nuns’ quarters, while her brother-in-law went to the car to fetch her belongings.

A twenty-five year old woman crept forward, bowed three times, and said rather loudly, “Luang Poh, I was raped by some men with minds like animals, now I am three months pregnant. My mother wants me to have the child taken out, but I don’t want to, I’m afraid it would be bad karma.” She spoke with complete unconcern at the glances of the others. Her tragedy had hardened her.

“That’s very good, miss. If you can think in that way, it’s very good. Just reflect that it’s your karma. I don’t advise taking innocent life under any circumstances. Misdeeds can only be atoned through forgiveness.”

“But Luang Poh, my problem is that I’m afraid the child will have a filthy character like its father. Is there some way I can prevent that? I don’t want to have an abortion, but I don’t want to have a bad child. Please advise me what to do.”

“That’s not difficult. Your problem is not a difficult one. Remember this, everybody. If you want your child to be good, clever, the parents must enter a meditation retreat. If you can practice while the child is still in the womb, that’s the ideal. If you can do that I guarantee 100% that the child will be good. Even if the father is a bandit, the child will be good.”

“But people who come to practice must give up meals in the afternoon and evening. Won’t that mean the child misses out on nutriment?” asked the pregnant woman.

“We make concessions for pregnant women and sick people. They can eat in the evening.” Phra Buahyao was the one who answered.

“In that case, I will go back to Bangkok and get my clothes. Tomorrow I will come to stay at the Wat. It’ll be a relief to get away from the gossip

and insults of my neighbors and work mates. Even though I don't take them seriously, I can't help getting annoyed at it sometimes, Luang Poh. People are strange, they really like to rub it in if someone's having trouble. Not only do they not help, they even aggravate the pain," she said roughly.

"Don't hold it against them, miss, don't be angry. People who rub in other people's grievances have very low minds. They are pitiful. You should forgive them and spread loving kindness to them. People who have such unwholesome minds are really worthy of your compassion."

"Yes, I'll try to do as you recommend. I must respectfully give my thanks for your kind help. I feel much better, now. I take my leave."

"Luang Poh, I've got breast cancer," said another complainant. "The doctor has made an appointment for an operation. I want to ask whether I should have the operation or not." Today must have been "National Woman's Day" as there were only women coming to seek the Phra Khru's help.

"Usually if people with cancer come to see me I don't recommend they have operations, because there is very little chance of recovery—about five percent. Those who don't have operations have a very good chance of recovery, about ninety percent—but they have to come and be treated by my method."

"What is involved in your method?"

"They should come and practice meditation. Meditation can cure all illnesses if it is done in earnest."

"Oh, Luang Poh, everything is meditation. Isn't there any other way?" The woman was becoming irritated. Luang Poh didn't take any notice, but spoke in an even voice, "Haven't you ever heard? 'Meditation counters karma'? Have you heard that? Some kinds of karma can be counteracted, and the best way to do it is through meditation."

"Luang Poh, what karma causes breast cancer?" asked another woman.

"As far as I can tell, it comes from stress. When we make ourselves stressful, we are inviting cancer. All kinds of cancer arise from stress."

"When they ask just tell them he's not in and that's the end of it," muttered Phra Buahyao. He was feeling stressful himself, having listened to so many stressful stories today. He felt sorry for his preceptor.

"Take it easy, Buahyao, take it easy, you may get breast cancer," said the preceptor calmly.

"No I won't Luang Poh, I'm not a woman."

"It's not a sure thing, maybe in your next life you'll be reborn as a woman and get breast cancer. You keep the stress from this life to give results in the next. It's called 'accumulated karma.'"

"I don't think so, Luang Poh, I don't plan on being reborn in a next life."

"If that becomes true, I offer my congratulations."

"*Sadhu*," said Phra Buahyao, joining his palms above his head, teasing his teacher.

"Luang Poh, I didn't make myself tense, it's other people who make me tense," said cancer patient.

"Who's the 'other people'?"

"My husband. My husband is a drunkard, a womanizer, he comes home late at night. He's what makes me so tense. He doesn't love me any more, does he?" she asked in a wavering voice.

"Whether he loves you or not is not the important thing, that's his mind. You can't force him to be what you want. It's much worse if you don't love yourself."

"Who doesn't love themselves? Are you talking about me?"

"Who else?"

"Gee, Luang Poh, why wouldn't I love myself? I love myself most of all in this world," said the thirty year old woman.

"If you loved yourself you wouldn't do what you are doing," he said. Then he took the opportunity to give a teaching to the people sitting there:

"Patrons, please remember this: In the future there are going to be more and more people with cancer, because our environment is getting more and more hectic. The way to protect yourself is to train your mind not to be tense. Tension is a kind of karma, you might say it's a new kind of karma. It's a karma that can be treated by training the mind, not doing the things that make it tense. Whatever anybody else does, that's their business. Your husband doesn't come home and you get all tense, don't you?" The last sentence was addressed to the woman who asked the last question.

"It's easy to say, Luang Poh, but not so easy to do," she countered.

"There. That's why I say you have to come and train in the Wat. Just think that you are transferring the time you would have spent in hospital into the Wat. Come and train your mind. But the mind is hard to train, you know, the hardest thing of all. Still, even though it's hard, if you really try it's not beyond your ability. When we have trained the mind we can let go of things. Whatever the environment is like we don't go and bury our minds in it, and so we aren't tense, understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Luang Poh, why is it that some people hardly get sick at all, while others are sick all the time, even though they live in the same environment?"

"If you investigate into the real first causes you would find that it's karma. People who don't get sick often have not molested other beings in past lives and this life. People who get sick often and yet who don't abuse beings in the present must have abused other beings in a past life. It is because of that karma that they have become sickly. It is due to causes and conditions. The cause determines the result," explained the Phra Khru.

"But old karma cannot be undone, we must accept the results. New karma can be corrected. For example, if you don't want to be a tense person in the future, in the present you must not hurt other beings. Is that right, Sir?" asked the woman.

"That's right, miss. Actually some forms of old karma can be alleviated to some extent by practicing meditation. Even though it can't absolve all past karma, meditation can help to alleviate it. For example, a person who has killed someone in the past must be killed by them in this life, but if that person enters a meditation retreat and spreads thoughts of loving kindness and dedicates the merits of his actions to those he has killed in the past it may help to bring about forgiveness and the karma becomes ineffective. However, if they do not forgive him, and they do come to kill him, at least he can soothe his mind with the thought that they are merely demanding payment for an old karmic debt. When they come for payment you just pay them. Thinking in this way the mind is not given to thoughts of vengeance and continuing the karmic retribution. This is the benefit of practicing meditation. A person who has never practiced doesn't know that the other person has come to settle an old account, and so he dies with a mind full of thoughts of retribution. With his mind in such an unskillful state, he falls into hell. When he gets out of hell he goes and continues the chain of karmic act and retribution indefinitely, and everybody just goes on paying karmic debts endlessly. That's what I mean by saying 'meditation corrects karma,'" explained the owner of the kuti.

"It's such a shame, meditation has so many benefits, but most people don't know about them. They think 'What use is it to sit with eyes and ears closed? Much better to get about making a living.' Most people think like this, Luang Poh," she said, recounting things as she had experienced them.

"It's their karma, sometimes we cannot do anything to help. Some people go to the trouble of coming to see me, but when I give them advice they can't accept it because they have so much karma, and they are forced to follow it. The details of karma are more profound and intricate than normal people like you and I can analyze."

"And is there anybody, Luang Poh, just one person, who can under-

stand the workings of karma in its full detail?"

"There is, the Lord Buddha himself. But he passed away long ago. All that's left is the Dhamma, the Teaching, for us to practice by."

"But some people don't believe that, Luang Poh. Not only do they not believe the teaching of the Buddha, they even doubt that the Buddha actually existed. They say it's all a fable. There are many people like this, I've met some already."

"If they don't believe then that's the end. There's nothing I can say to such people, other than 'Enough said'. It's their karma. Arguing with them wouldn't serve any purpose, just like people who are blind from birth, who don't believe that there is such a thing as light. Don't go wasting your time arguing with them. Just leave them to their karma," said the Phra Khru, teaching her how to establish equanimity.



Chapter 40

After coming to the monastery Khun Thong applied himself diligently to helping the Phra Khru. He not only swept the Phra Khru's premises but also helped to receive the guests who came to see the Phra Khru for their various reasons. He also organized a time schedule for receiving visitors, which he posted up in front of the Phra Khru's residence, so that the Phra Khru would have some time to rest and do his personal business—writing his handbook on judging the progress of meditators.

The Phra Khru had Somchai move up into a small room on the upstairs of the kuti and Khun Thong moved into Somchai's old room downstairs. Somchai was overjoyed to have someone help out in his duties, even if the appearance of the new arrival was a little offensive to him; it was better than doing it all himself.

One of Khun Thong's character traits was that he loved animals. At home, one of his regular tasks was to feed the dogs, pigs, and chickens, and that was how he spent most of his time.

Khun Thong didn't come to Wat Ambhavan empty-handed. He brought with him three little puppies that had just been weaned: Mee, Home, and Khow. They were all from the same litter, but Mee ("Bear") was bigger than the others. His fur was jet black and his bearing really was bear-like.

Home and Khow were almost half the size of Mee, and their faces were definitely "little puppy" faces. Home had brown fur, while Khow's fur was the same as his name (khov = white).

Khun Thong loved the three puppies so much that he clearly segregated them from the "temple dogs" that lived around them. However, even though they were dogs with collars, the three puppies were not proud types, so they were not molested by the other dogs in the Wat. Khun Thong allowed Mee, Home and Khov to sleep with him on the lower floor of the

Phra Khru's residence. The Phra Khru had no objections, as he felt an affection for them, especially Mee. The feeling was so strong that he used his "perceiving" to find out why. He found that in the past Mee had been a valiant soldier serving with him. Such a shame that he had been reborn in the lower realm of the beasts.

The beings born into the lower realms are classified as "untrainable." They are incapable of receiving the Dhamma. However, it must have been Mee's good karma to have met up with the Phra Khru again, as next life he would not have to be reborn in the lower realms. The Phra Khru would help as much as he could.

"Venerable Uncle, Sir, that rock is really in the way, can I take it away somewhere else?" asked Khun Thong as the Phra Khru finished his meal. Ever since his arrival he had organized the Phra Khru to have his meals upstairs so as to prevent people taking the chance to come and talk to him while he was eating.

"What rock?"

"The one that looks like an ogre's egg."

"I've never seen an ogre's egg, so I don't know which rock you're referring to, but if you mean the one that's to the right of my seat, I wouldn't touch it if I were you. I tell you, that's no ordinary rock."

"Gosh, Venerable Uncle, I was only asking, and you tell me off," sulked his nephew, fluttering his eyelashes coquettish. The Phra Khru had gotten used to his mannerisms and no longer reprimanded him, to save his sensibilities.

"Anyway, how many rocks are there in your kuti, Venerable Uncle? Since I've been here I've only ever seen one. And what's so special about it. Is it a magic rock?" asked the young man.

"Don't refer to him as 'it.' I'll tell you, but don't go telling anybody else. That rock has a spirit in it. He wanted to come here to practice meditation, so I allow him to live on the downstairs floor."

"Is it a man or a woman," asked Khun Thong. Although he believed in ghosts, he wasn't afraid of them, so he didn't make any screams.

"It's a man."

"Is he handsome?"

"What's it to you?"

"If he's handsome, then I can woo him for a boyfriend," answered the man who thought he was a woman. "It'd be really great to have a ghost for a boyfriend."

The Phra Khru hastened to warn him: "Look, please, Khun Thong,

don't go thinking such vulgar thoughts in my kuti. The reason I have allowed you to come and stay here is to practice virtue."

"Is it evil to want a boyfriend?" retorted the young man.

"It's not only sexually perverted, it transgresses the frontiers of the worlds. Anyway, he has a lover already. Have you noticed the wooden post leaning against the tree behind the kuti? That's his girlfriend."

"That black post?"

"That's right. There's a woman's spirit in there. She came following the man in the rock." At this Khun Thong squealed, "Waaah! Blow me over with a feather! She's a ghost and she still wants a husband! A ghost who wants a husband! Well, I never, I really never have seen such a thing in my whole life!"

"A ghost who wants a husband is still better than a man who wants a husband like Khun Thong," said the Phra Khru sarcastically.

"And not only that, he wants a ghost for a boyfriend, right?" Instead of being insulted, Khun Thong continued the banter with his Venerable Uncle. The Phra Khru had learnt more about his nephew's character. Usually effeminate men were afraid of ghosts, easily angered and quick-tongued, but Khun Thong was not like that. The Phra Khru was beginning to see some hope for him.

"When are you going to stop affecting your mannerisms, Khun Thong?" asked the Phra Khru to change to the subject.

"No way, no way. It's in the stars that I must be like this, so I have to be like this, Venerable Uncle."

"Do you believe in the stars more than in karma, then?"

"I live beneath the stars so how can I not believe them?"

"Well, I live beneath the stars, too, but I don't believe in astrology. I only believe in the force of karma."

"I don't necessarily believe the same as you do, Venerable Uncle. Or do you say I should?" he asked.

"Of course. I'm not trying to force you to believe in what I believe in, I just want you to believe in the truth, not fantasy."

"Oh, when it comes to belief it's something that can't be forced, Venerable Uncle. We all have different karma, different perspectives, so how can we possibly think the same or believe the same?"

"Oh, what day is it today? Khun Thong's really speaking well!" praised the Phra Khru.

"It's Friday, the ninth waxing day of the third month, Year of the Monkey, 1974 A D" answered Khun Thong, having just looked at the calendar.

"All right, just do whatever you have to do, I'm going to continue my writing," said the Phra Khru, dismissing him. Khun Thong wasn't offended. He bowed three times, and began preparing the dishes for the meal he would have with Somchai downstairs.

The Phra Khru came down, washed his hands and rinsed his mouth in the bathroom, and then went up to continue his writing. He would come down again at 2:30 PM to receive visitors, according to Khun Thong's schedule.

Phra Buahyao finished his meditation and sat spreading thoughts of loving kindness and dedicating the merits of his practice to his mother and father, his enemies and all other beings. After the morning meal he had begun walking meditation and sitting until the time for the midday meal. He had done this every day as a practice, except on days when there was some business to be attended to or a doubt to ask his teacher about, in which case he would go to the Phra Khru's kuti.

He had begun to accustom himself to the lifestyle of a "homeless one," a lifestyle that was simple and calm, in which he did not have to fall a slave of his desires or be misled into trouble. Now he had definitely made up his mind to stay in the monk's robes until his last dying breath, he had no ideas of disrobing and getting married and raising a family like other people.

His main wish right now was to meet up with the "monk in the forest" who had been the Phra Khru's meditation teacher in the Dong Phraya Yen Forest a year ago. Phra Buahyao believed that the "monk in the forest" that the Phra Khru spoke of was none other than the Arahant known as Uttara, who the Great Emperor Ashoka had sent to spread Buddhism in the land of Suvannabhumi in the year 309 BC while he reigned in Pataliputra. This piece of history he had gleaned from a book he had borrowed from Phra Maha Boon. The book stated:

"The Emperor Ashoka the Great sent messengers to spread the teaching of Buddhism to many countries. He sent the Venerables Sona and Uttara to Suvannabhumi ..."

Phra Buahyao had asked the Phra Khru about this but he wouldn't confirm it. But then he didn't deny it either. He only said that whenever he encountered a problem that he couldn't solve, he would meet up with the "monk in the forest" without having to go the Dong Phraya Yen Forest.

The twenty-six year old monk couldn't explain to others why he believed this way. It was completely irrational. Human beings usually lived no more than a hundred years at most, how could anyone could live for more than two thousand years? No-one would believe it. Yet he couldn't

figure why it was that he believed it. He had only to read about the Emperor Ashoka's missions, and then hear the story of the "monk in the forest" from the Phra Khru, and he put the two stories together with the conclusion that Phra Uttara was the "monk in the forest." He was even more convinced when the Phra Khru did not deny his story. He was also convinced that one day he would be able to substantiate his belief. The Phra Khru had left him this puzzle:

"If you are really determined to know, one day you will surely know. I want you to know for yourself rather than to simply believe what I tell you."

Phra Buahyao was just preparing to go to the eating hall, when, opening the door of his kuti, he found a letter waiting for him on the floor. He picked it up and opened it. It was the handwriting of Rume, his step-father, but the words were from his mother. Boonpha, being Vietnamese, could not read or write Thai. He read his mother's letter carefully. It was dated January 13, 1974, and began:

"Buahyao, my dear child,

I received your letter dated December 25 1973 just after the new year. I am happy to hear that you are a monk. We are very busy so haven't had a chance to reply until a strange incident occurred this morning, so I have asked Rume to write this letter for me.

In the early morning both your mother and Rume had the same dream: we both saw you in the yellow robes, telling us to give up killing animals for a living and to find some other way of livelihood. Actually we have wanted to stop for a long time now but we have not been able to find any other means of livelihood. Just last month Rume dreamed a lottery number and so he spent twenty baht on an 'underground' lottery ticket. His number came through. More important, I am preparing to have a younger brother or sister for you. Since the day I got pregnant I've found the smell of beef or buffalo meat repulsive, so I haven't been helping Rume cut up the meat at all.

Today is Observance Day, so we don't have to kill any animals, which is good. And it seems luck is with us, because yesterday a man came to our boss and asked to take on the job of slaughterer. The boss said if Rume leaves he'll take him on. Rume had gone to ask to leave a few days before because he felt sorry for me. Yesterday we told the boss we would be leaving, and just this morning we had the dream. It must be the merit we have obtained from your ordaining that has influenced us to give up slaughtering. If I get a new address I'll write and let you know. We hope you are feeling well. If you have time, come and visit us,

Love and care,

Signed Boonpha and Rume

The letter filled Phra Buahyao with joy. He hurried to the Phra Khru's kuti to tell him the news. Khun Thong led him up to see his Venerable Uncle on the upstairs level because the lower level was full of people waiting to see the Phra Khru, even though it would be another three hours before he came down.

"Something up, Buahyao? If you're not in a hurry, have the midday meal first," said the Phra Khru. After bowing three times to his preceptor, the student said, "I'm not hungry, Luang Poh, I'm full on joy."

"Joy over what, then?" Instead of answering, Phra Buahyao gave the Phra Khru his letter. The Phra Khru read it and said warmly, "Congratulations. You see? You've succeeded. Do you see the good results of spreading loving kindness?"

"Yes, now I see. I want to thank you deeply for your kindness not only to me but also my mother. If it's not too much trouble, I would like to ask your permission to also spread thoughts of loving kindness to my father."

"Why would it be any trouble? Just do as you have already done, except you must do a little more, because if your concentration is not sufficient your kind thoughts and merits will not reach him. You must practice harder than this if you want to send thoughts to other realms. It all depends on your practice and perseverance."

"Go at it, Venerable Brother, I'm right behind you," cheered on Khun Tong.

"If you help I guarantee he'll be successful," said the Phra Khru, sensing a way to encourage his nephew.

"Ooh! Let's not go too far, Venerable Uncle," said Khun Thong, "just let me give moral support, that's enough, don't expect me to get down and 'right step, left step' with him."

"Luang Poh, you once said that there was a man who had already done this, a man from Norway. I ask to allow you to tell the story."

"Certainly. Seeing as you have allowed me, I will allow you to listen to it," said the Phra Khru, mimicking his 'younger brother.'

"Thank you, Sir. Please go ahead and tell the story."

"Have you seen the picture of the Westerner in front of my seat? That's him."

"Oh? The one sitting in meditation posture with closed eyes? That one? He's sooo handsome!" said Khun Thong.

"You can admire him but don't go falling in love with him, he's already married," cautioned the Phra Khru.

"Really? Such a shame. Khun Thong's broken hearted already," he

said, putting his hands over his heart.

"Are you going to listen or not? If not, you can go downstairs," said the Phra Khru gently.

"Yes, I'll listen. My, just this and he's angry already," mumbled Khun Thong. The Phra Khru began his story:

"His name was Viggo Brun, he was a Norwegian, but he teaches at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. He came to ordain here in 1969."

"What religion did he adhere to?"

"Christian. But he was interested in Buddhism. He teaches the Thai language in the Copenhagen University. He got a scholarship from his University to do post-graduate studies in the Literature Department of Chulalongkorn University. He told me that his grandfather was a professor in a university in Norway and he liked to read about Buddhism. He had read the whole Tipitaka in English, as much as is translated. When he came to Thailand, his grandfather gave him a blessing: 'Grandson, when you go to Thailand, don't forget to bring back something good for me.' That's what he said. This professor was really clever. He knew that Thailand had some good things in it, unlike many of the Thai people who still don't know."

"What good things?" asked Phra Buahyao and Khun Thong together.

"There, you see? The two Thai people sitting here don't know about it either."

"Only one Thai person, Sir, I'm Vietnamese," said Phra Buahyao.

"There, worthless, both the Thai and the Vietnamese. Well then, if you don't know you don't know, you can listen to what I tell you. At his grandfather's words, Viggo asked him what good things he was talking about. His grandfather just said, never mind, when you get there you'll find out. Then Viggo came to Thailand in 1968. He studied for one year. At the end of the term, during the holidays, he got the idea to ordain as a monk, so he read the Vinaya Pitaka, which deals with the monks' discipline, all eight volumes of it. He can read Thai. He spoke better than many Thais. So he started looking for a Wat to ordain in. He looked at Wats in Bangkok, Ayudhaya, Ang Thong, Lopburi, until he made his way to Wat Ambhavan. He went through four provinces and couldn't find a Wat that suited him. He found what he wanted in the fifth province, here at Wat Ambhavan."

"How did he decide on which monastery to stay in?" asked Phra Buahyao.

"He would ask questions of the monks in each Wat, but none of the Wats he went to could answer. He asked: 'What is it that is carried by four, led by three, one sits in a chair while two lead him along?' He said no-one

could answer it, so he came to ask me. I don't know if my answer was right or not, because he didn't tell me his answer, but as soon as I had answered he asked to ordain."

"How did you answer?"

"You try answering. If it was you, how would you answer this question?" he asked Phra Buahyao.

"I don't know, but I'd like to know what your answer was."

"I said that the four people carrying referred to our own body which is supported by the four elements, *pathavidhatu*, *vayodhatu*, *apodhatu* and *tejodhatu*."

"Venerable Uncle, I don't understand, please explain it in simple language for me," pleaded Khun Thong. Phra Buahyao took on the duty of translating it into simple terms, telling him that the four elements the Phra Khru was referring to were the elements of earth, water, wind and fire.

"The three people leading the procession are the defilements, greed, aversion and delusion. The one person sitting in the chair is the mind. A person is made up of two parts, the physical and the mental. The physical body is brought about by the convergence of the four elements. The mental aspect is the mind. The two people leading it all are merit and demerit (*puñña and papa*). That is, as long as a person is alive he is led by the defilements of greed, aversion and delusion. Once a person dies he is led by the merit and demerit he has made, which lead him to woeful or favorable states. As soon as I had answered he asked to ordain. He said he had read and understood the whole of the Basket of Discipline. He could remember the 227 rules of the Patimokkha discipline. I saw that he was ready so I allowed him to ordain and taught him meditation. He practiced diligently and ardently, and he could give really good Dhamma talks. I took him to give talks at various functions. He could even give 'Question & Answer' talks. The people really liked him. One day I took him to give a talk at a funeral, and he started criticizing the children of the deceased. I had to rush him back to the Wat."

"Why did he criticize them?"

"They did it wrong. It was their father's funeral, but all the children were drunk. Viggo asked them, 'Who is lying in the coffin?' The children said, 'It's our father. Don't you know? Didn't the Venerable Elder who brought you along tell you?' He said 'I know, the Venerable Elder told me, too, but I asked you because I want to know why it is that when your father has died you just sit and drink in front of the coffin. What merit does your father obtain from that?'"

"When he had said that, the children began to look aggressive. Drunk people lose their sense of right and wrong, they can't tell the difference between a monk and a lay person. As soon as he had said something that grated their ears they were ready to lay into the monk. I had to rush him back to the Wat. The people who came to listen to a talk didn't want us to go, they said, 'Luang Poh, please stay,' but I said, 'We can't stay, Viggo has angered them already.'"

"And when did he spread thoughts of loving kindness to his mother and father?"

"After he had been ordained for two months. He really practiced diligently. He could tell you exactly how many steps it was around the Wat, and how many minutes it would take to walk meditation around it. One day he came to ask me whether he could spread thoughts of loving kindness to his father and mother in Norway. I looked at his face, sized him up, and said, yes he could. He did what you did. One day he came to see me with a letter in his hand. He was crying. He said he was so overjoyed. It had taken a month for the letter to reach the Wat. On the journey from Norway it had gotten waylaid at Chulalongkorn University. One of his friends saw it so he brought it here for him. He told me that on the day he had practiced meditation he had spread thoughts of loving kindness to his grandfather, mother, father and two of his close friends. His mother wrote all about what happened in her letter, noting the exact date and time that Viggo had spread loving kindness to them.

"His mother told how on that day his grandfather, his father and his two close friends were chatting together in the guest room. His mother was not well, but she was lying listening to the conversation in her room. As soon as the four of them started talking about Viggo, his mother got up and joined in the conversation, and everybody saw a yellow cloth in the east flash up and disappear. His grandfather said,

"My grandson has found something good in Thailand.' His mother went into her room, took a pen and paper and wrote the letter to tell him about it. It was really strange. His two friends were amazed."

"I'm sooo amazed myself, Venerable Uncle. How could it be? A yellow cloth from Thailand floating all the way to Norway?"

"It wasn't a real yellow cloth, Khun Thong. What those five people saw was a *nimitta*, an image. If you want to check it out for yourself, you have to try practicing some meditation," said the Phra Khru invitingly.

"Ooy! Meditation, such meditation! Khun Thong won't have any of it," he said loudly.