

The Legacy

In the period following his cremation, many of the monks in Ācariya Mun's lineage remained distraught as they continued to feel the loss of their one reliable refuge in life. Like kites with their strings broken, drifting at the mercy of the winds, they wandered off in all directions. Their spirits depressed, they felt like small, helpless orphans who had lost both parents. Consequently, the circle of practicing monks in Ācariya Mun's lineage found itself quite unsettled in the immediate aftermath of his funeral. By the time they eventually began to regroup, they had all realized the harmful effects of being without a good teacher.

The passing away of an outstanding *ācariya* is never a small matter. Invariably it affects the community of practicing monks in a very serious way shaking them like an earthquake to their very foundations. If his disciples have already established themselves firmly in the practice, possessing the mental fortitude to hold their own while helping to sustain their fellow monks, then the long-term effects will not be so adverse. Whether it's a family leader, a social leader, a business leader, a government leader, or a leader in any branch of the community of monks the death of a good leader is always felt as a huge loss. Since it is ultimately unavoidable, those subordinates who depend on their leadership should earnestly prepare themselves for such an eventuality so that they may prosper now and in the future.

When Ācariya Mun passed away, I saw the incredibly harmful effects that such a loss can have. He was only a single individual, but vast numbers of monks and lay devotees were so grieved by his death that they appeared to be left in a state of ruin like a building whose foundation has been damaged so that its entire structure suffers accordingly. I was shocked by this development, and worried for the future of the circle of practicing monks who could easily suffer damage without the protection of a strong teacher. If we do not make the effort to intensify our practice and get results while our teacher is still alive, upon his death we will be like the living dead, lacking firm principles of our own to hold on to.

I myself was caught woefully unprepared at that time. It was a terrible experience. I felt as if the winds of a cyclone were raging through my heart, blowing me in all directions. One storm blew in to assail me with the thought that I had been left stranded without a refuge; another blew in to fill me with doubts and left me wondering about whom I could possibly rely on now. Then a gale blew through, driving the thought that, having passed away sublimely without any concerns, he had left me behind feeling empty and lifeless to drift along hopelessly without a mainstay to which I could cling. Yet another wind buffeted me with the thought that everything would come to an end now that he was gone: Who would I stay with now that my father had died? Did this really signal my downfall? No sooner had I begun to stand on my own than my father left me. What a terrible misfortune! Another howling wind inveighed against the miserable bad luck of this poor orphan: *I am finished for sure this time, and at such a crucial juncture in my own development as well. The kilesas and Dhamma are engaged in a full-scale war, and Ācariya Mun had been my advisor, helping me to work out a battle plan. Who will have this kind of compassion for me in the future?* I had never reached such an agonizing impasse before. I felt as though I had fallen into an infernal pit of mortal despair. All hope seemed lost as I lived on without him.

Such was my troubled state of mind when Ācariya Mun passed away. That experience chastened me. Ever since then I've been loath to see other practicing monks encounter a similar agonizing experience simply because they lack the firm principles needed to stand on their own. Fearing that they will miss their rightful destiny by default, I constantly warn them of the dangers. Should they wait until the sun has already set before rushing to find a safe refuge, I'm concerned they may end up feeling as empty and lifeless as I did. Not wishing to see this happen, I caution them to hurry and intensify their efforts while the moon is still bright, their hearts still willing, and their bodies still able. Thus committed, those desiring to attain the wealth of virtue inherent within *magga*, *phala*, and Nibbāna can still manage to do so. They need not live poverty-stricken amid a world of spiritual riches.

Relics Transformed

All the people, who received some of the bone fragments that were distributed after Ācariya Mun's cremation, placed them in suitable

reliquaries and worshipped these relics in his stead. Everyone went their separate ways after the funeral, and nothing further was heard about this matter until some four years later when Khun Wan Khomanamun, owner of the Siriphon Phanit Store and the Suddhiphon Hotel in Nakhon Ratchasima, returned to Sakon Nakhon for a merit-making ceremony. When he presented a cloth offering at Wat Suddhawatt monastery, where Ācariya Mun had passed away, the abbot gave him a piece of bone taken from Ācariya Mun's funeral pyre. Upon returning home, he decided to place it in the reliquary with the other remains of Ācariya Mun which he had received four years earlier. When he opened the container, he was astonished to find that these bone fragments, received at the cremation, had all been transformed into crystal-like relics.¹ He was so amazed at seeing them that his spirits soared. He quickly sent someone to check on another set of Ācariya Mun's remains that he kept in a reliquary at the Suddhiphon Hotel, and discovered that they too had been transformed into crystal-like relics. A small portion of the original bone remained in the form of a coarse powder, but soon that, too, underwent the same transformation. In the end, a total of 344 relics were counted in the two reliquaries belonging to Khun Wan. This was the first instance where Ācariya Mun's remains were found to have transformed into relics.

News of this miracle spread far and wide. Soon people began coming to ask him for a share of the relics. Khun Wan was a very generous person and he sympathized with their request. So, he shared the relics out among them one or two at a time. He very kindly gave me some on two occasions. On the first occasion, I received five; on the second, two, making seven altogether. As soon as I received them I publicized the fact that I had something very special. I was enormously pleased to have them, but my mouth wasn't satisfied to keep quiet about it. In the end I lost out some women came and took them all. But, oddly enough, I was not at all disappointed that they took advantage of me. And there being nothing left to publicize, my mouth was finally satisfied.

When word got out that I had something very special, the first people who came to ask to see them were all women. When I brought out the relics, first, this woman picked one up to inspect it; then, that woman picked one up to inspect it. Before I knew it, each of them had quietly slipped the one she was holding into her pocket, asking me if she could keep it. Who would dare ask for their return at that point, and make a

fool of himself twice. Since then I have never had any of Ācariya Mun's relics in my possession. Later, I heard that Khun Wan had given so many of his relics away to other devotees that he had hardly any left; so, I didn't dare to bother him again.

It is my understanding that Khun Wan's store in Nakhon Ratchasima was the first place where Ācariya Mun's bone fragments were discovered to be genuine relics. From that time on, such relics have appeared in many different places where faithful people, who received pieces of Ācariya Mun's bone, continued to worship them with special reverence. Even today, people still discover that Ācariya Mun's bone fragments have turned into relics, though the families who have them keep very quiet, fearing that others will ask for a share of these rare, priceless gems. In any case, someone who did not have an inherent spiritual connection with Ācariya Mun would find it difficult to receive one of his relics to worship. Just look at me: I received several of them but lacked the merit necessary to look after them I had to give them to someone else to care for them in my place.

Ācariya Mun's relics possess many strange, amazing qualities. One person who owned two of them made a solemn wish that his two relics become three so that he would have one for each of the "Three Jewels": Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Soon afterward a third relic materialized with the other two. Another person with two relics made the same solemn wish, but instead of increasing, the two fused into one, which greatly disappointed him. This person told me what had happened and asked my advice. I explained to him that whether one has three of Ācariya Mun's relics, or one of them, or merely a bone fragment that has yet to undergo any transformation, all are essentially relics from his body. So no one should be disappointed if two became one, for it's a miraculous occurrence just the same. What could be more amazing than that? Even the hair samples from Ācariya Mun's head which were collected when he shaved his head each month, and which are now kept and revered by people in many different places have undergone a transformation similar to the bone fragments. In either case, the result is the same: undergoing an essential transformation, both become relics.

People who have genuine relics of Ācariya Mun cherish them so much that they keep very quiet about it. But, if someone inquires skeptically

whether Ācariya Mun's bones really did become relics, the same people will answer boldly in the affirmative. Should they then be asked whether or not they possess any, they will just smile and say they have so few they couldn't possibly give one away, thus precluding someone from asking. For this reason, it is difficult to find out these days who actually possesses Ācariya Mun's relics. Even if they were asked by a monk whom they revere, they would probably give a rather vague answer. So we must sympathize with those who venerate and treasure Ācariya Mun's relics.

As a living teacher, Ācariya Mun was extremely influential. He had very effective methods for alleviating the mental stress and feelings of anxiety experienced by his followers. Many people have recounted instances when they were determined to commit evil, or their minds were very hot and agitated, or they felt vengeful enough to kill someone and the mere thought of Ācariya Mun then was enough to cause these emotions and ideas to subside immediately. It was as though he had doused their flaming hearts with cool water, allowing them to realize their misunderstandings. Their harmful thoughts had simply vanished. The sense of relief they felt made them want to prostrate before him then and there. Many lay followers have testified to this, and surely there are many more unreported cases of devotees using the power of remembering Ācariya Mun to successfully counter their wrongful intentions. Many monks, as well, have used the power of their faith in him to restrain themselves in accordance with their spiritual calling.

During his lifetime Ācariya Mun trained countless numbers of people to be good, righteous individuals. At least forty years of his life as a monk were spent engaged in teaching monks and laity from all over the country. Just think of how many monks and how many lay people must have trained under him in that forty year period. If we consider only the monks, the disciples who became accomplished in meditation and the way of practice were already numerous. These monks have in turn become *ācariyas*, teaching their own disciples how to develop firm principles for the future. All of this resulted from Ācariya Mun's pioneering efforts to pass on that knowledge and understanding to others. Without his guidance they would never have been able to find the right path, to say nothing of teaching others how to practice it.

The task of laying a firm spiritual foundation in the heart, so that it is solidly anchored in reason and propriety, is an important and difficult one far more so than any other seemingly difficult task we've ever done. Spiritual work, like all other work, follows the lead of the heart. In truth, the primary basis for everything we do is found in the heart. The heart is both instigator and director of all affairs concerning good and evil, right and wrong. Being both arbiter and taskmaster in all moral issues, the more the heart learns about itself and its relation to matters of good, evil, right, and wrong, the better equipped it will be to sustain itself in a smooth, safe, and joyful manner. Those of us, who were aware of Ācariya Mun's profound knowledge of this subject, feel obliged to pay homage to him with unshakable faith. While he was alive, we were constantly reminded of the depth of his understanding. And although he has now passed away, we have never forgotten it. We cannot help but recollect him with a profound and boundless sense of gratitude.

Ācariya Mun was a teacher of the highest caliber when it came to developing people's hearts a development that goes straight to the essential core of life in this world. A heart well developed in Dhamma is unlikely to suffer adverse consequences. More than that, we can state with confidence that a fully developed heart will never suffer any adverse consequences at all. All its actions will bring beneficial results. A world in which proper spiritual development keeps pace with material development is a truly progressive world where people are bound to live in peace and happiness. When the material side of the world progresses at the expense of the spiritual side, people's hearts are forever ablaze, so the world experiences strife, oppression, exploitation, and corruption on a grand scale. Such progress is equivalent to the advance of the fires of hell. If you want to know what the advancing fires of hell are like, you need only look at a world devoid of spiritual development; a world that is constantly polluted by the heart's filthy excretions. When the heart is neglected, people's behavior becomes perverse, immoral, irritating, and quite offensive. So much so that nothing of pleasure or praiseworthiness can be found in a world ruled by impropriety.

Understanding this, wise, intelligent people emphasize spiritual development over all other kinds of development which are all merely creations of the heart anyway. Once the heart has been well developed,

its overriding influence then cleanses all aspects of a person's behavior. The world thus enjoys peace and happiness following the lead of intelligent people who have developed themselves spiritually, and therefore, strive to govern society with reason, according to the principles of Dhamma.

We should be very wary of admiring or trusting the intelligence of people who lack spiritual development even if they're so clever that they can explore the sun, the moon, and the stars. Such achievements are not all that significant; especially if the intelligence in question is of the kind that is unmindful of its own misdoing and exudes poisonous elements that cause trouble in society. Applied indiscriminately, this 'clever' knowledge may well lead to behavior rivaling that of common animals that ruthlessly prey on and devour each other, believing all the while that it is a clever way to satisfy their needs. Regardless of our position in society, genuine intelligence is measured by our ability to use the principles of reason to bring prosperity to ourselves and others, and there is no need to earn a diploma to certify it. Thoughts and actions bringing peace and happiness to ourselves and others are considered the true fruits of genuine intelligence; and as such, they constitute their own certificate of recognition. We need not boast of our credentials to verify our intelligence. In fact, such certification may secretly act as a cover for immoral behavior. In that case, the means may be furtive, but the resultant disturbance to others is no secret the troublesome problems it creates are obvious everywhere we look.

Such is the harm that arises when spiritual development is overlooked. Who can seriously believe that material development alone driven by people whose hearts are corroded by *kilesas* and corrupted by selfish motives will ever bring true peace and prosperity to the world? Only someone who is completely insensitive to moral issues could possibly accept this view. The difference between the actions of those who have developed themselves spiritually and those who have not is the difference between day and night. It was for this reason that the Lord Buddha did not recommend that the *samādhi* attainments be used for such psychic purposes as levitating, diving through the earth, or walking on water. He did not praise the intelligence of people acting like that. On the contrary, he praised as intelligent those who made an effort to thoroughly train themselves in the way of virtue, regardless of whether they were using *samādhi* attainments or some other means to

achieve this. Such people are a blessing to themselves and to others, for a sense of contentment is the primary determinant of how pleasant our world really is. Even though the state of our health and other physical needs may be uncertain, following the fluctuating nature of *anicca*, life remains pleasant if our hearts have sufficient contentment to insure us against life becoming unbearable.

Questions have arisen concerning the spontaneous transformation of the bone remains of Ācariya Mun and Ācariya Sao into relics. As news of this marvel spread shortly after the first relics of Ācariya Mun appeared, many people voiced doubts about why the bone remains of ordinary people could not also become relics: after all, the bones of an Arahant and the bones of an ordinary person are composed of the same body elements. Why is it that only an Arahant's bones can become relics? What's the essential difference between the two?

Briefly, my own explanation is that the heart, or the *citta*, is the fundamental, determining factor here. Although the *citta* is something common to all living beings, it varies greatly in power and quality from one person to the next. As for an Arahant, his *citta* is an *ariyacitta*; meaning that it is absolutely pure. The *citta* of the average person, on the other hand, is merely an ordinary *citta*; meaning, that it is polluted by *kilesas*. In either case, the nature of the *citta* the master and prime mover _ has a decisive impact on the condition of the physical body in which it resides. For instance, the Arahant's *citta* being pure, it may well have the power to cleanse his body elements, making them pure as well, and thus, allowing his bones to transmute into relics. Although the body of an ordinary person is composed of the same types of elements, the body's master, the *citta*, is full of *kilesas*. It has no power to cleanse the body elements and purify them. Because the body elements have not been purified, the cremated bones of the average person remain unchanged, reflecting the impure nature of the *citta*. We could say that purified elements are synonymous with the *ariyacitta*, while ordinary elements are synonymous with the ordinary *citta*. The attributes of the Arahant's *citta* and by extension, his body elements differ significantly from those of the average person, so their bone remains are bound to differ as well.

However, I am not sure that, after death, the bones of all Arahants will automatically be transformed to relics. The *citta* of someone attaining

the level of Arahant is completely purified at the moment of its attainment. The question remains: When the body of an Arahant is cremated, do the remaining bones become relics in each and every case or not? From one Arahant to another, there is a considerable difference in time between the moment when he reaches that attainment and the moment when he finally passes away. The bones of living Arahants, who maintain their body elements for a long period of time after their attainment, are very likely to become relics after death. This is due to the length of time involved. The *citta* of an Arahant maintains the body elements by means of the various life-sustaining systems present in the body, like the breath for example. At the same time, an Arahant maintains throughout his daily activities an intrinsic level of *samādhi* that steadily works to cleanse his body elements until they also become pure. This results in his bone remains becoming relics after he passes away. But I'm not convinced that the bone remains of an Arahant, who passes away shortly after his attainment, do become relics, since his body elements were not subject to the same lengthy cleansing process mentioned above.

An Arahant classified as *dandhābhiññā* is one who attains enlightenment slowly and gradually. He may well reach the Anāgāmi level, and then be stuck there for a long time before he finally reaches the level of Arahant. He must spend a lot of time investigating back and forth between *arahattamagga* and *arahattaphala* before the *citta* develops sufficient strength and skill to pass beyond. This process of investigating *arahattamagga* for the sake of attaining *arahattaphala* is in fact an effective means of cleansing the body elements. Having finally attained the level of Arahant, his bones may well become relics after he passes away. On the other hand, I am not at all sure that the bones of an Arahant, who attains enlightenment quickly that is, *khippābhiññā* and then passes away shortly afterward, will necessarily become relics, since his purified *citta* would have very little time to cleanse his body elements. As for the ordinary *citta* of the average person, producing a transformation from bone to relic is well beyond its capability.

Not only were Ācariya Mun's bone remains clearly transformed into relics, but some of these relics then underwent some amazing changes of their own. As I have already mentioned, someone who had two relics made a solemn wish that they become three and was rewarded with an

extra one. Someone with two wished for a third and ended up with only one instead. Although it seems virtually impossible, such transformations actually happened.

There was another strange case where a man who had been given two relics one morning found three when he looked again that evening: in the short period between morning and evening they had increased from two to three. The man in question was a senior government official with enormous faith in Ācariya Mun. From the day he passed away until the time of his cremation, this man had been extremely helpful in nearly every aspect of the funeral arrangements. A certain senior monk, having received some relics from Khun Wan of Nakhon Ratchasima and remembering this man's kind assistance, gave him a pair as a keepsake one morning. The man felt an overwhelming sense of joy the moment he was handed that precious gift. Having nothing suitable to put them in just then, he put the relics in an empty snuff bottle for the time being. He closed the cap tightly and placed the bottle in his shirt pocket, buttoning it for good measure to insure against loss. Upon leaving the monastery that morning, he went directly to work where he spent the whole day in a bright, happy frame of mind, his thoughts returning time and again to the relics he had just received.

Arriving home that evening, he excitedly told his family that he had received something splendid, a gift he had never received before. After the whole household gathered around to see what it was, he produced a proper reliquary for holding the relics. Opening the snuff bottle to remove the relics, he saw, to his amazement, that there were three of them. This sight heightened his reverence for Ācariya Mun, and he was so overjoyed at receiving the relics that he could hardly contain himself. He boldly proclaimed to his wife and children that this was a genuine miracle proof that Ācariya Mun was truly an Arahant. His family were somewhat skeptical, worried that, perhaps, he had miscounted them in the morning. He refused to accept this, arguing vehemently that he clearly remembered being given two relics by the senior monk that morning. He insisted that he had accepted them with great interest and respect. Even at work he had kept them in mind all day, repeating to himself "two relics, two relics", as though it was a meditation subject. How could he have forgotten how many there were? He told his family that if they still harbored any doubts, tomorrow he would take them all to ask the senior monk: then they would realize that

what he said was true. But his family didn't want to wait: they were determined to go immediately. So, they all agreed to go straight away. Upon arriving at the monastery, the government official asked the senior monk how many relics he had given him that morning.

"I gave you two relics. Why do you ask? Is one missing?"

"No, none are missing. In fact, they have actually increased by one, so now I have three! The reason I ask is, when I returned home and opened the bottle to remove the relics and place them in a reliquary, there were three instead of the two I expected to see. This made me tremble with joy. I quickly told my wife and children what had happened, but no one believed me. Afraid that I had miscounted them, they insisted that I come again and ask you to make sure. Now that we know the truth, I feel even happier. Well, what do you say do you believe me now?"

His wife smiled and said she was worried that he may have miscounted them, or that perhaps he was just kidding her. She just wanted to make sure. Since it was obviously true, she believed it; she had no intention of denying the truth. At this the senior monk smiled and explained to her what had happened:

"This morning I gave your husband two relics. He was always especially helpful to Ācariya Mun and the rest of the monks. He gave us invaluable assistance from the time Ācariya Mun died until his cremation was completed. I have never forgotten this, so, when I was given some relics by Khun Wan of Nakhon Ratchasima, I put a few aside to give to your husband as a keepsake since they are so hard to find nowadays. Ācariya Mun is the first person I have ever encountered whose bones have changed to relics. Though such things are mentioned in the ancient texts, I had never seen the real thing with my own eyes. Now I have seen irrefutable proof. Please keep them in a suitable place and look after them well. Should they happen to vanish one day, your disappointment will be far more profound than the joy you felt when they increased in number. Don't say I didn't warn you. Ācariya Mun's relics possess very miraculous properties. When they can increase in number as easily as they just have for you, they can just as easily vanish if they are not properly respected. Please keep them in a prominent, high place and pay homage to them every morning and evening. They

may well bring you some unexpected good fortune. I am absolutely convinced that Ācariya Mun was a monk of the highest purity, but I don't tell people this very often for fear they may think I'm crazy. You see, people tend to easily believe in bad things, but they have difficulty believing in good ones. Consequently, it is difficult to find a good person but easy to find a bad one. By observing ourselves, we will notice that we too tend to prefer thinking in unwholesome rather than in wholesome ways."

When the senior monk finished speaking, the government official and his wife respectfully took leave of him and returned home in an exceptionally cheerful mood.

I have mentioned these strange, miraculous properties of Ācariya Mun's relics so that my readers may ponder for themselves what causes such phenomena to occur. Those searching for scientific proof to authenticate their occurrence will find empirical evidence hard to come by. Since such things are impossible for people with *kilesas* to fathom, they may not find a shred of evidence to support them. The difference between the body elements of an Arahant and those of the rest of us is clearly demonstrated by the fact that an Arahant's bones can become genuine relics. As for the body elements of people with *kilesas*: even the cremated remains of a million such people will never produce the same results. Thus it is clear that a living Arahant is a human being who is incomparably different from the rest of us. Just the fact that his heart is pure makes him stand out in a uniquely amazing way. His attainment is something that the whole world should respect and revere.

Other Mysteries

Ordinarily, people's sense of their own self-importance makes it difficult for them to believe in someone else's superiority. Nevertheless, aspiring to be good people, they feel obliged to accept what is obviously true, for refusing to accept manifestations of genuine goodness would show a kind of stupidity that defies human dignity. Take Ācariya Mun, for example. I am unaware of any monk, novice, or nun, who knew him well and understood what he taught but remained so stubborn and conceited that they refuse to accept the truth of his teaching. More- over, they all seemed to be quite willing to sacrifice their lives for him.

The way of truth and purity, that he taught in such detail, can be compared to a discipline like mathematics: both are established in fixed principles that give precise results when followed correctly. For example, one plus one must equal two, two plus two must equal four. No matter how many multiples are calculated in this fashion, the calculations will always be correct so long as the basic rules are applied. Whether it is an adult making the calculations, or a child, if the right method is followed, then the results will inevitably be correct. No matter how many people may come along arbitrarily denying the validity of these basic principles, their truth remains the same. Such people merely display their own senseless stupidity. Likewise, principles of Truth do not depend on the whims of any particular age group, gender, or nationality. They are accepted as irrefutable natural laws. The principles of Dhamma, that the Lord Buddha and the Arahants fully realized to be true, can be proclaimed in their entirety with absolute assurance about their validity.

Ācariya Mun was one individual who fully realized the principles of Truth within himself. He could fully describe all the knowledge about internal and external phenomena that he had so clearly attained, without concern for the belief or disbelief or the praise or criticism of others. Every aspect of his internal practice beginning with moral discipline and *samādhi*, and progressing all the way to the absolute freedom of Nibbāna was declared openly and boldly so that his listeners could make use of that knowledge according to their own capabilities. He spoke fearlessly about the external aspects of his practice, like *devas*, *brahmas*, and various types of ghosts, leaving it up to his listeners to investigate as best they could. Besides receiving encouragement in their practice, those who shared his natural inclination to perceive such phenomena, were able to significantly broaden the scope of their knowledge, enabling themselves to deal expeditiously with the mysterious phenomena they encountered.

Some of his disciples bore witness to these phenomena, though they did not possess nearly the mastery that he did. I'll give you an example. One night Ācariya Mun received groups of *devas* late into the night, having no chance to rest. Eventually feeling very tired, he wanted to lay down for a while. When yet another group of *devas* arrived late that night, he explained to them that he was very tired from receiving several previous groups and now needed a rest. He requested that they

go instead to visit one of his disciples and listen to his Dhamma discourse which they did. When told what Ācariya Mun had said, this disciple agreed to talk with them about Dhamma for awhile, after which they left.

The next morning this monk asked Ācariya Mun about the incident: "Last night a group of *devas* came to visit me. They said that, before coming to me, they had paid you a visit to request a Dhamma teaching, but you were very tired and needed a rest, so you sent them to me instead. Is this true, or were they misleading me just so they could listen to me talk about Dhamma? Feeling somewhat skeptical, I wanted to ask you about it."

Ācariya Mun replied:

"Well, having already received several groups of *devas*, I was dead tired. Then the last group came, so I sent them to you, exactly as they said. Believe me, *devas* never lie to monks. They are not like human beings, who tend to be quite deceitful and untrustworthy. When *devas* make a promise, they always keep it; and when they make an appointment, they are always right on time. I have associated with terrestrial and celestial *devas* for a long time now and I have never heard them say anything false or deceitful. They are far more honest and virtuous than humans are. They scrupulously honor their word as if their very lives depended on it. They will severely criticize anyone who deviates from his word; and if that individual does not have a genuinely sound reason for failing to honor his commitments, they lose all respect for him.

"They have criticized me sometimes, though I had no intention of being dishonest. On certain occasions I entered into a deep state of *samādhi* prior to the appointed hour. I became absorbed there, only to find the *devas* waiting for me when I finally withdrew to a level where I could access them. When they reproached me for making them wait so long, I explained that I had been resting in *samādhi* and inadvertently failed to withdraw at the scheduled time, a reason which they accepted.

"Then there were other occasions when I reproached the *devas*. I explained to them that I am only one individual, yet tens or even hundreds of thousands of *devas* from the upper and lower realms insist

on coming to visit this one monk: How could anyone successfully manage to receive each and every group exactly on time? There are times when my health is not so good, yet I must patiently sit there receiving visitors. You should sympathize with some of the difficulties I face. Sometimes I'm pleasantly absorbed in *samādhi*, only to get roundly criticized when I withdraw a little later than scheduled. If that's how it's going to be, I'll just keep to myself and not waste my time and energy receiving visitors. What do you say to that? When rebuked like this, the *devas* invariably admitted their mistake and immediately asked for forgiveness.

"Those *devas* who visit me often are familiar with my way of doing things, so, they don't mind if I am a little late sometimes. It's those who have never come before that tend to mind my being late, since by nature they place such a high value on truthfulness. All *devas* from all realms, including terrestrial *devas*, are the same in this respect. Sometimes, being aware that I must withdraw from a restful state of *samādhi* to receive them, they do worry about the moral consequences of criticizing me for not keeping my word. I occasionally counter their reproaches by telling them I actually value my word more than my own life: 'The reason that I did not withdraw from *samādhi* in time to receive you was due to an obligation I have to Dhamma, which is something far more important than any promise made to a *deva*. Although *devas* and *brahmas* of the celestial realms possess nonphysical forms more refined than this human body of mine, my *citta* and my sense of truthfulness are exceedingly more subtle than those of all the *devas* and *brahmas* combined. But I am not one to talk incessantly about such things like some idiot. I mention it to you now only to remind you how important the Dhamma I maintain really is. So please consider the consequences carefully before criticizing me.'

"Once I explained my true priorities to them, the *devas* realized their mistake and felt very concerned about the moral implications of what they had done. Together they asked for my forgiveness. I made a point of assuring them that I do not feel any resentment toward any living being in the whole universe: 'I put my trust in the Dhamma of compassion and loving kindness which is devoid of all forms of malice. My every activity is governed by the Dhamma of absolute purity. *Devas*, on the other hand, possess only wholesome intentions and a sense of integrity qualities that are not really all that amazing. The Lord

Buddha and the Arahants possess an integrity that is pure because the Dhamma in their hearts is absolutely pure. No living being in the universe can possibly imagine just how supremely amazing such a state of purity is. The kind of integrity that *devas* observe is something that exists within the sphere of conventional reality. And the knowledge and the practice of it are well within the range of all living beings. The Dhamma integrity of a pure heart, however, is the exclusive property of the Buddha and the Arahants. No one who has yet to realize that attainment can possibly comprehend it or put it into practice. Whether or not I myself possess an absolutely pure level of integrity is not a matter to boast about. But please keep in mind that, in contrast to the Dhamma integrity of the Lord Buddha and the Arahants, the moral integrity that *devas* observe is neither exceptional or unique.' "

Had Ācariya Mun addressed these words to human beings instead of *devas*, the humans would probably have felt embarrassed or something even worse. But the *devas* were keen to hear his Dhamma, and so listened with intense interest to what he said. They were able to realize the mistake they made in taking liberties with him out of their ignorance of the situation. They were more than glad to carefully guard their conduct after that. They weren't angered or offended in the least. Ācariya Mun said that such admirable behavior was truly commensurate with their lofty plane of existence.

This brief example should serve as food for thought about the mysterious phenomena existing beyond the range of the physical senses. Such phenomena are mysterious only to those unable to perceive them; they cease to be a mystery to those who can. This same principle applies to *dhammābhisamaya*.² So long as the Lord Buddha was the only person capable of comprehending the true nature of Dhamma, that Dhamma remained a mystery to everyone else. But once the Buddha's Arahant disciples comprehended that same Dhamma, its true nature ceased to be a mystery to them. So it is with the mysterious phenomena mentioned above: they cease to be a mystery to those who can perceive them.

At the time of the Lord Buddha, he and his Arahant disciples were the only ones capable of fully comprehending the mysterious nature of Dhamma, and the only ones capable of perceiving every type of mysterious external phenomena. Such things were not common

knowledge. Many people at that time were incapable of perceiving these mysteries. At most, they had heard about such things, and, after consideration, they came to believe in them, being satisfied of their existence even though they hadn't perceived them directly. Others, who also considered the matter, refused to believe in these mysteries. This became a hindrance to their practice, preventing them from unreservedly following the Lord Buddha and his Arahant disciples. It is the same today: only those possessing an innate capacity to perceive these phenomena can uncover their mysteries; for the rest it's just hearsay. Whether we choose to believe in such things or not, there is unlikely to be any scientific evidence to prove their existence. I too might have been tempted to disbelieve, but I never found enough reason to be skeptical. So I have tried to remain impartial and simply write Ācariya Mun's story as he and his senior disciples related it to me.

Although my knowledge of these matters is not very astute, I must admit that my heart is full of immense faith and respect for Ācariya Mun. If someone whom I trusted were to come to me and suggest that I exchange my own life for that of Ācariya Mun, so he could return from the dead to teach again pointing out that with my stupidity I could never possibly teach others the way I would agree immediately, provided I could confirm what he said to be true. If he could guarantee that Ācariya Mun would return in exchange for my life, I would quickly arrange for my own death then and there without a second's delay. In truth, I've been quite troubled by my own stupidity for a long time now. Although no one has ever requested that I exchange my life for Ācariya Mun's return, I am constantly disappointed, that in writing his biography, I am unable to remember so many things he kindly recounted to me in such detail. Because of my poor memory, so much of what he said has been lost. I feel rather apologetic even about what I have been able to remember and write down. The little that has stuck in my memory is a bit like a pet animal that sticks to its owner, no matter what, and never runs away. In any case, what is written here can merely serve to whet the reader's appetite, as words alone cannot properly convey the mystery of these things.

In modern-day Thailand, Ācariya Mun was the person responsible for reviving an interest in experiencing these internal and external insights, though very few people could hope to perceive such mysterious phenomena nearly as well as he did. It's almost as though Ācariya Mun

was practicing for the sake of sharp vision and clear understanding, while the rest of us were practicing for the sake of blind ignorance, and were thus never able to see as he did. The fact that so little has been written here about his unusual abilities is a result of my own failure to take enough interest in these matters when he explained them to us. Still, to my knowledge, none of his disciples possessing similar abilities ever contradicted what he said about them. Instead, they themselves bore witness to the existence of these mysterious things. Which should be enough of an indication to convince the rest of us, who are not sufficiently skilled in their perception, that these things do exist even though they are hidden from view. In the same way, the Lord Buddha was the first person to attain enlightenment and the first person to perceive many mysterious phenomena attainments that his Arahant disciples were eventually able to duplicate, and bear witness to.

In our present time, the sort of unusual phenomena that was perceptible to Ācariya Mun ceased to be mysterious to a few of his contemporaries who possessed an ability similar to his. This is evident in the case of another mysterious affair that, though quite intriguing, is likely to raise doubts among those of us who are self-confessed skeptics. While Ācariya Mun lived at Ban Nong Pheu monastery, an elderly, white-robed lay woman from the local community, who had great respect for him, came to the monastery and told him about an experience she had in meditation. As she sat in meditation late one night, her *citta* 'converged', dropping deeply into *samādhi*. Remaining absolutely still in that state for a time, she began to notice a very fine thread-like tentacle flowing out of her *citta* and away from her body. Her curiosity aroused, she followed the flow of her *citta* to find out where it had slipped away to, what it was doing, and why. In doing so she discovered that this subtle flow of consciousness was preparing to reserve a new birthplace in the womb of her own niece who lived in the same village this despite the fact that she herself was still very much alive. This discovery shocked her, so she quickly brought her *citta* back to its base and withdrew from *samādhi*. She was greatly troubled for she knew that her niece was already one month pregnant.

The next morning she hurried off to the monastery and related the whole affair to Ācariya Mun. Listening quietly, many of the monks overheard what she said. Having never heard anything like it before, we were all puzzled by such a strange tale. I was especially interested in

this affair and how Ācariya Mun would respond to the elderly lady. We sat perfectly still in breathless anticipation, all eyes on Ācariya Mun, waiting to hear his reply. He sat with eyes closed for about two minutes and then spoke to the elderly lady, telling her precisely what she should do.

"The next time your *citta* `converges' into calm like that carefully examine the flow of your *citta*. Should you notice that the flow of your *citta* has again gone outward, then you must concentrate on severing that outward flow with intuitive wisdom. If you succeed in completely cutting it off with wisdom, it will not reappear in the future. But it's imperative that you carefully examine it and then fully concentrate on severing it with wisdom. Don't just do it halfheartedly, or else, I warn you, when you die you'll be reborn in your niece's womb. Remember well what I'm telling you. If you don't succeed in cutting off this outward flow of your *citta*, when you die you will surely be reborn in your niece's womb. I have no doubt about this."

Having received this advice, the elderly lady returned home. Two days later she came to the monastery looking bright and cheerful. It didn't require any special insight to tell from her expression that she had been successful. Ācariya Mun began questioning her the moment she sat down.

"What happened? Did you manage to prevent yourself from being reborn within your niece's womb despite being very much alive?"

"Yes, I severed that connection the very first night. As soon as my *citta* `converged' into a state of complete calm, focusing my attention there, I saw exactly what I had seen before. So I concentrated on severing it with intuitive wisdom, just as you said, until it finally snapped apart. Again last night I examined it thoroughly and couldn't find anything _ it had simply disappeared. Today I could not wait any longer. I just had to come and tell you about it."

"Well, that is a good example of how very subtle the *citta* can be. Only someone who practices meditation can become aware of such things there is no other way. You nearly fell prey to the *kilesas*, which were preparing to shove you into your niece's womb without you being

aware of it. It's a good thing you uncovered it in your meditation and managed to correct it in time."

Shortly after the flow of her aunt's *citta* to her womb had been severed, the woman's niece had a miscarriage, thus cutting that connection for good.

Soon the monks in the monastery began pondering two questions related to that incident: one to do with the rebirth of a person who has yet to die, the other to do with miscarriages. The old woman never told anyone in the village about what happened, so no one else knew about it. But having heard the whole affair as it was related to Ñcariya Mun, the monks were well informed about the incident. This prompted several questions, so the monks asked Ñcariya Mun for an explanation. To the question: "How could a person who has not yet died begin to take birth in a womb?", he answered as follows:

"She was merely preparing to take birth, the process had not been completed yet. It's quite common for preparations to be made before the work takes place. In this case, she was making the preparations but she had yet to finalize them. So it would be incorrect to say that a person can be reborn while she is still alive. But had she not been so perceptive, she would certainly have established a new home in her niece's womb."

To the second question: "Isn't severing the flow of the *citta*, connecting the elderly lady to her niece, tantamount to destroying a human life?", he answered as follows:

"What was there to destroy? She merely severed the flow of her *citta*. She didn't cut off the head of a living being. The true *citta* remained with that woman the whole time; it simply sent a tentacle out to latch on to her niece. As soon as she realized it and cut the outward flow of her *citta* to break that connection, that was the end of the matter."

The important point here was, Ñcariya Mun did not contradict the old woman when she described how the flow of her *citta* had stolen out to reserve a place in her niece's womb. He did not dispute the truth of her experience, telling her that she was mistaken or that she should reconsider the nature of her assumptions. Instead, he responded by addressing her experience directly.

This story is very intriguing because there was in fact a good reason why her *citta* flowed out to her niece. The woman said she had always been very fond of her niece, keeping in constant touch and always doting on her. But she never suspected that anything mysterious lurked in their relationship, waiting to sneak out and cause her to be reborn as her niece's child. If Ācariya Mun had not helped to solve this problem, she would have ended up in that young woman's womb for sure.

Ācariya Mun stated that it is far beyond the average person's capabilities to fathom the *citta's* extraordinary complexity, making it very difficult for them to properly look after the *citta* and avoid jeopardizing their own well-being. Had that woman possessed no basis in *samādhi* meditation, she would have had no means of understanding the way the *citta* functions in relation to living and dying. Consequently, *samādhi* meditation is an effective means of dealing correctly with the *citta*. This is especially true at critical junctures in life when mindfulness and wisdom are extremely important aids to understanding and caring for the *citta*. When these faculties are well developed, they are able to effectively intervene and neutralize severe pain so that it does not overwhelm the heart at the time of death.

Death is an absolutely crucial time when defeat means, at the very least, a missed opportunity for the next life. For instance, someone who misses out at death may be reborn as an animal and be forced to waste time, stuck for the duration of that animal's life and suffering the agony of that lowly existence as well. If, however, the *citta* is skillful, having enough mindfulness to properly support it, then a human birth is the least one can expect. Over and above that, one may be reborn in a heavenly realm and enjoy a variety of celestial pleasures for a long time before being reborn eventually as a human being again. When reborn as a human being, the virtuous tendencies, that were developed in previous lives, are not forgotten. In this way, the power of an individual's inherent virtue increases gradually with each successive birth until the *citta* gains the strength and ability to look after itself. Dying then becomes merely a process by which an individual exchanges one bodily form for another, progressing from lower to higher, from grosser to ever more refined forms of existence and eventually from the cycle of *saṃsāra* to the freedom of Nibbāna. This is similar to the way that the Lord Buddha and his Arahant disciples raised the quality of successive existences over many lifetimes, while

altering their spiritual makeup steadily until there were no more changes to be made. Thus it is that a *citta* trained in virtue through each successive rebirth, is eventually transformed into the treasure of Nibbāna. All of which stems directly from the *citta* being trained gradually, step by step, in the way of virtue. For this reason, wise, intelligent men and women of all ages never tire of doing good deeds that redound to their spiritual credit, always enhancing their well-being now and in the future.

I feel I must apologize to the reader for meandering so much in telling Ācariya Mun's story. I am trying very hard to present his biography in an orderly fashion, but my inherent forgetfulness has caused me to mix up the subject matter, putting first what should have come last, while putting last what should have come first. Although the story of Ācariya Mun's life has already drawn to a close, I am still tacking on afterthoughts that I failed to remember earlier on. Because of this tendency, there's still no end in sight. As you read along you'll see how unreliable I am at arranging events in their proper sequence.

Another intriguing incident took place one morning at Ban Nong Pheu monastery when Ācariya Mun, rising from meditation, came out of his room and, before anyone spoke, immediately told the monks to look under his hut and tell him whether or not they could see the track of a large snake imprinted in the dirt there. He explained to them that the night before a great *nāga* had come to visit him and to listen to Dhamma. Before it left, he had asked it to leave some marks on the ground as a visible sign to show the monks in the morning. The monks informed him that they could see the track of a very large snake trailing out from underneath his hut and into the forest. There being no other tracks leading in, they could not tell how it had gotten there. The only visible track was the one going out from under his hut. The ground around his hut was swept clean so other tracks would have been easily noticed; but there were no others; only the one. Ācariya Mun told them they need not look for others because they wouldn't find them. He reiterated that the *nāga* left directly from his hut soon after he requested it to leave a mark on the ground below.

Had the monks seen the track first and then asked Ācariya Mun about it, the incident would not be so thought-provoking. The intriguing fact is that Ācariya Mun immediately broached the subject first, without

being prompted; and sure enough, they then found the track of a large snake under his hut. Which means that, perceiving the *nāga* with his inner eye, he told it to leave some visible mark for the monks to see with their physical eyes, since their inner eyes were blind and they had no way to see the *nāga* when it came to visit.

Later when they had an opportunity, the monks asked Ācariya Mun whether the *nāgas* who visited him appeared in a serpent-like form or in some other form. He replied that one could never be sure with *nāgas* how they would appear.

"If they come for the purpose of listening to Dhamma, as they did last night, then they'll come in the form of a human being of a comparable social status to their own. A great *nāga* will come in the guise of a sovereign king surrounded by a royal entourage. Its comportment will be very regal in every respect; so when I discuss Dhamma with it I use royal terms of speech, just as I would with any royal personage. Its entourage resembles a delegation of government officials accompanying a crowned head of state. They all behave in a most polite, respectful manner much more so than we humans do. They sit perfectly still when listening to Dhamma, showing no signs of restlessness. When discussing Dhamma with me, the leader always speaks on behalf of the whole group. Anyone with a question will refer it to the leader first. Then he asks me and I give a reply. Once I have answered all their questions, they all depart together."

Here is another incident that we can take on faith about Ācariya Mun's extraordinary abilities, even though its true nature lies beyond our comprehension. A certain monk noticed that Ācariya Mun liked to smoke a particular brand of cigarettes,³ so he told a lay supporter to use some money he had been offered to buy some for Ācariya Mun. The lay supporter complied; and the monk then offered them to Ācariya Mun. At first Ācariya Mun said nothing, probably because he was speaking on Dhamma at the time and did not have any opportunity to investigate the matter. But, the following morning when that monk went to see him, he ordered him to take the cigarettes away. He said that he would not smoke them since they were owned in common by many different people. The monk in question assured Ācariya Mun that the cigarettes belonged to him alone, since he had told a lay supporter to buy them with his own money the day before. He specifically had

them purchased as an offering for Ācariya Mun, so they could not possibly be owned in common by many people. Ācariya Mun reiterated that he wanted them taken away. Being owned in common by many different people, the offering was not 'pure', so he did not want to smoke them.

Not daring to press the issue any further for fear of being rebuked, the monk was obliged to take back the cigarettes. He sent for the lay supporter who had purchased them for him and asked what had happened. It turned out that this layman had taken money belonging to many different monks, all of whom instructed him to buy some necessity or other. He had used the money left over from those purchases to buy the cigarettes. The monk asked him for the names of the monks whose money was involved, and then hurried off to find them. Once he explained about the mix-up with the cigarettes, each was more than happy to see them offered to Ācariya Mun. So the monk took the cigarettes and once more offered them to Ācariya Mun, confessing that he was really at fault for not questioning the layman thoroughly about the matter first. He acknowledged that Ācariya Mun was exactly right: the layman confirmed that he had taken money belonging to many different monks and put it all together to make various purchases. Since all the monks had been asked and were happy to share the offer of cigarettes to Ācariya Mun, he was offering them again. Ācariya Mun took them without saying a word and the matter was never mentioned again.

Later, that monk told some of his fellow monks how he first tried unsuccessfully to contradict Ācariya Mun, only to discover in the end that Ācariya Mun was exactly right. Some monks were puzzled as to how he could possibly have known whose money was involved in the cigarette purchase since he had never been informed about it. One monk at this informal meeting spoke up, protesting vigorously.

"Were he simply like the rest of us, obviously he wouldn't have known a thing. But it's precisely because he is so very different from us that we respect him and admire his superior wisdom. All of us gathered here under his tutelage realize that his capabilities are as different from ours as day is from night. Although I don't know much, I do know for certain that he is wiser and more knowledgeable than I am in every way. I see he is truly above reproach, which is why I have entrusted my

life to him and his training methods with self-effacing humility. My heart is still full of *kilesas*, but those *kilesas* are very afraid of him, so they don't dare show their faces in his presence. I believe this is due to my willingness to surrender to him out of fear and respect, an attitude far more powerful than these vile *kilesas*, which naturally tend to oppose the teacher. Confronted by Ācariya Mun, they give up completely, not daring to display the same reckless abandon they do when I live with other teachers.

If we feel we cannot submit wholeheartedly to his judgment, then we do not belong here under his guidance. Should we persist in staying under those conditions, we will not benefit at all only harm will come. What more need be said after this incident with the cigarettes."

Just an unwholesome train of thought in the middle of the night was enough to elicit a stern response from him the next morning. Meeting Ācariya Mun, the offending monk would be met by his sharp, penetrating gaze, a gaze that seemed to pierce the culprit and tear him to pieces. In a situation like that it was inadvisable to approach him or attempt to help him with his requisites, since he would strictly refuse to allow that monk to do anything for him. It was his indirect way of tormenting the monk's innate stubbornness. But it is strange how a monk initially felt quite chastened, yet somehow the effect didn't last long. He felt chastened at the moment he was stung by a severe reprimand; but later, when Ācariya Mun spoke to him in a normal tone of voice he would let down his guard and make the same mistake again. Despite having no intention of thinking in ways that were harmful to himself, he was simply unable to keep up with his own restive thoughts, which tended to jump from one thing to another quicker than a horde of wild monkeys. Later on, when the same monk went to see Ācariya Mun again, he could sense immediately that he was not welcome just the look in Ācariya Mun's eyes was enough to make him extremely wary. Even with that, he had yet to fully learn his lesson. After a while, if the dangers of his way of thinking were not brought home again to him, he would inadvertently begin to befriend those harmful thoughts once more, entertaining them as if they were actually something worthwhile. That is why I say that, despite feeling quite chastened, somehow the effect didn't last long. When he not only felt chastened but also remained very conscious of the fear of revisiting those thoughts, then the positive effects were long-lasting. His mind remained cool, calm,

and peaceful throughout. The next time he went to see Ācariya Mun, he needn't be so fearful about being taken to task.

My own mind tended to react in a very similar fashion. Being unable to rely on myself alone, I could not allow myself to stray far from my teacher. Living with him I was always fearful and on guard, which prevented my thoughts from deviating from the path of practice.

Becoming quickly aware when my mind did stray, I was able to pull it back in time to avoid harmful consequences.

I am absolutely convinced that Ācariya Mun could read my thoughts. Whether or not he could read other people's thoughts doesn't concern me so much. What does concern me is how he used that ability to mitigate my own stubborn tendencies and teach me a good lesson. There was a time, when I first went to stay with him, that I thought, rather bizarrely: *They say that Ācariya Mun can read other people's thoughts, that he knows everything we're thinking. Can this really be true? If it is true, then he needn't take an interest in everything I'm thinking I just want to know if he's aware of what I'm thinking right now. That would be enough. If he does know what I'm thinking at this moment, I will prostrate myself before him. That's all I ask of him.*

Coming face to face with him that evening I could hardly sit still. As his eyes glared directly at me without blinking, I felt in my heart that he was about to shout and point straight at me. When he began speaking to the assembled monks, I was so worried about being singled out and scolded for stubbornly testing him, that I had a hard time paying attention. Before long his voice began cracking like a whip as it rained down blows all around me, brushing past and narrowly missing me time and again until finally the whip lashed into the very core of my being. I became flushed as my body shook uncontrollably. The more my fear mounted, the more agitated I became until all traces of contentment vanished from my heart. While I sat there, his voice kept whipping and lashing at my heart, his words hitting home time and time again until by the end of his talk I could no longer bear the pressure. My heart gave in to him, thinking: *I thought as I did simply because I wanted to know if you could truly read other people's thoughts. I had no intention of disparaging your other virtuous qualities. I now acknowledge that you are a true master in every respect, so I wish to*

entrust my life to you until the day I die. Please have compassion for me and assist me with your teaching. Please don't become fed up with me because of this one incident.

Once my heart completely surrendered to him, the fiery tone in his voice began to subside. Finally he concluded by elucidating a basic principle.

"Right and wrong both exist within yourself. Why don't you take an interest in looking there? What's the point in meddling in the rights and wrongs of others? Is this the type of thinking that will make you a good, skillful person? Even though you may find out how good or skillful someone else is, if you yourself are neither good nor skillful, then you will never be successful. If you want to know how good other people are, first you must thoroughly examine yourself; then, knowledge about others will come on its own. There is no need to test them to find out. Good, skillful people do not have to resort to such testing. A good person who is truly skillful in Dhamma can know about others without having to test them."

Ācariya Mun ended his talk to the monks on this note. I almost fainted at the time, sitting there soaked with sweat. Surrendering to him completely that night, I learned a lesson I've never forgotten _ never again did I dare to test him out. Had I been as severely chastened about matters concerning my own practice as I was that night about matters concerning Ācariya Mun, then I would probably have transcended *dukkha* long ago. But, alas, I have never been able to chasten myself to such good effect, which really rankles me sometimes.

This was another issue that the monks discussed secretly among themselves at their informal meeting, which I also attended. Since this incident involved me personally, I've included it here with the story about the cigarettes to highlight the principle that the truth about the nature of Truth exists all around us everywhere, at all times _ *akāliko*. All that's required is that we practice sincerely until we attain the Truth; then we will surely understand the nature of that Truth, the fullest extent of our understanding being conditioned only by the natural limitations of our inherent abilities. This includes the intrinsic truths, or *saccadhamma*, as well as all the various forms of extrinsic knowledge. Keep in mind also that people differ in the type and degree of the

inherent good qualities they have developed through successive existences, as well as the spiritual goals they have variously set for themselves. But the primary results of *magga*, *phala*, and Nibbāna do not differ. These results are the same for everyone who attains them.

The Adventures of Ācariya Chob

Ācariya Mun was a teacher whose unique mode of practice will never be forgotten by those of us who were closely associated with him. Many such senior disciples of his are still alive today. Each *ācariya* differs somewhat in his inherent virtuous qualities, his specific mode of practice, and the special kinds of knowledge and understanding he has attained as a result. Earlier on I mentioned some of these *ācariyas* by name; but there are many others whose names were not identified. Nonetheless, it was always my intention to identify one of his senior disciples in particular, once the story of Ācariya Mun's life was completed, so that the reader could learn something of the way he practiced, the experiences he encountered, and the insights he gained. Ācariya Mun's disciples followed in his footsteps much in the same manner that the Lord Buddha's Arahant disciples followed in his, experiencing many difficulties along the way before ultimately attaining the same knowledge and understanding that their teacher had before them. The extent to which these monks met with spine-tingling, frightening situations in their practice environment depended largely on the nature of the places where they lived and traveled.

This brings me to one senior disciple of Ācariya Mun for whom I have a great amount of respect. Since this *ācariya's dhutanga* experiences are quite different from most of his contemporaries, I would like to present here some episodes from his practice as evidence of the possibility that some of the unusual external phenomena commonly reported at the time of the Buddha may still exist today. Certain incidents in the life of the Buddha like the elephant who gave him protection and the monkey who offered him honeycomb may have their modern-day parallels in some of this *acariya's* experiences. To demonstrate the authenticity of the episodes I'm about to relate, I shall identify him by name. He is Ācariya Chob⁴ who, having been ordained as a monk for many years, is now about 70 years old. He has always preferred living in remote forest and mountain areas and still does so to

this day. Since he likes to trek through such wilderness areas at night, he's constantly encountering nocturnal creatures like wild tigers.

Leaving Lomsak in Phetchabun province one afternoon, he started trekking north toward Lampang in the province of Chiang Mai. As he was about to enter a large tract of forest, he met with some local villagers who advised him, with obvious concern, to spend the night near their village and then continue on the next morning. They warned him that the forest he was about to enter was vast, so there was no way someone entering it in the afternoon could get through to the other side before dark. Those who ended up stranded in this forest after dark invariably became food for the huge tigers that roamed there at night. Since it was already afternoon, he had no chance to hike through it in time. Once darkness fell, the tigers began roaming around looking for something to eat, and they considered any person that they happened on as just another source of food. Since no one ever escaped from them alive, the villagers were fearful that Ācariya Chob would meet the same fate. It was already well after noon, so they did not want him to enter the forest. They told him that a notice had been posted, warning travelers about this 'forest of *yakkhas*' to keep them from being eaten by those monsters. Being curious, Ācariya Chob asked what *yakkhas* they were talking about. He had read old accounts about such creatures but had never actually seen one. They told him that it was just their way of referring to those huge, striped tigers who devoured anyone failing to make it through the forest by nightfall. They invited him to return with them to their village and spend the night there. He could then have a meal the next morning and continue on his journey.

Telling them that he intended to continue walking anyway, Ācariya Chob refused to return to the village. Concerned for his safety, they insisted that, no matter how fast he walked, by having started this late in the day he could not possibly reach the other side before nightfall and would end up stranded in the middle of that vast forest. But, determined to press ahead, he refused to be deterred. They asked him if he was afraid of tigers. He acknowledged that he was but said it was irrelevant: he intended to go in any case. They insisted that the tigers there never ran away from people. If he encountered one, he was sure to lose his life. If he wanted to avoid being attacked by man-eating tigers, he should wait until morning to proceed further. He replied that should his *kamma* dictate that he was destined to be eaten by tigers, then that's

the way it would be. If, however, he was destined to continue living, then the tigers wouldn't trouble him.

Taking leave of the villagers, Ācariya Chob resumed his journey, feeling no qualms about dying. No sooner had he begun to enter the forest than he noticed that both sides of the trail he was on were covered with claw prints, where tigers had been scratching in the earth. He saw piles of tiger scat scattered all along the trail some of it old, some of it quite fresh. As he walked along doing meditation practice, he observed these telltale signs, but he wasn't afraid. By the time he had reached the very middle of the forest, darkness had closed in all around him.

Suddenly, he heard the roar of a huge tiger coming up behind him, followed by the roar of another huge tiger moving toward him, both calling out to each other as they quickly closed in on him. The roaring sounds from both directions grew closer and louder until suddenly both tigers emerged from the darkness at the same moment one, merely six feet in front of him and the other a mere six feet behind. The sound of their roars had become deafening. Seeing the gravity of the situation, Ācariya Chob stood transfixed in the middle of the trail. He saw that the tiger in front of him was crouched and ready to pounce. Glancing behind him, he saw that the tiger there, too, was crouched and ready to pounce. Fear arose in him then, for he was sure that this signaled the end of his life. Petrified with fear, he stood stock-still, rooted to the spot. But his mindfulness remained strong, so he concentrated his mind intently, and that prevented him from panicking. Even though he might be killed by those tigers, he would not allow his mind to falter. With that resolve, he turned the focus of his attention away from the tigers and back within himself, thus excluding everything external from his awareness. At that moment, his *citta* 'converged', dropping quickly into a deep state of *samādhi*. As this occurred, the knowledge arose in him that the tigers could not possibly harm him. After that, everything in the world simply vanished, including himself and the tigers. Experiencing no physical sensations whatsoever, he was totally unaware of what then happened to his body. All awareness of the external world, including his physical presence, had utterly disappeared. Which meant that awareness of the tigers had also disappeared. His *citta* had 'converged' completely, dropping to the very base of *samādhi*, and many hours passed before it withdrew from that state.

When his *citta* finally withdrew, he found that he was still standing in the same position as before. His umbrella and alms bowl were still slung over his shoulder, and in one hand he still carried a candle lantern, which had long since gone out. So he lit another candle and looked around for the tigers; but they were nowhere to be found. He had no idea where they had disappeared to.

Withdrawing from *samādhi* that night, he felt no fear whatsoever. His heart was full of such remarkable courage that even if hundreds of tigers appeared at that moment, he would have remained completely unperturbed; for, he had seen with absolute clarity the extraordinary power of the *citta*. He felt amazed to have escaped the gaping jaws of those two tigers a sense of amazement defying description. Standing there alone in the forest, Ācariya Chob was suddenly overcome by a feeling of compassionate affection for the two tigers. In his mind they became friends who, having provided him with a lesson in Dhamma, then miraculously disappeared. He no longer feared them in fact, he actually missed them.

Ācariya Chob described both tigers as being enormous: each was about the size of a racehorse, though its body length well exceeded that of a horse. Their heads would easily have measured sixteen inches from ear to ear. He had never in his life seen tigers that were so grotesquely large. Consequently, when he first saw them he stood petrified, stiff as a corpse. Fortunately, his mindfulness remained strong throughout. Later, after his *citta* had withdrawn from *samādhi*, he felt joyful and serene. He knew then that he could go wherever he wished without fearing anything in the world. Believing wholeheartedly that the *citta*, when fully integrated with Dhamma, reigns supreme in the universe, he was convinced that nothing could possibly harm him.

With this serene Dhamma filling his heart, he resumed his trek through the forest, practicing walking meditation as he hiked along. His two tiger friends were still fresh in his mind and he often thought about them. He felt that, were he to see them again, he could easily walk up and playfully stroke their backs as if they were pets, though it's questionable whether they would ever allow it.

Ācariya Chob walked the rest of that night in peace and solitude, buoyed by a joyful heart. When day finally broke, he still had not

reached the end of the forest. It wasn't until nine o'clock that morning that he emerged from the forest to arrive at a village settlement. Putting down his belongings, he put on his outer robes and walked through the village for alms. When the inhabitants saw him entering the village with his alms bowl, they called out to one another to come and offer him food. Having placed food in his bowl, some of them followed him back to where he had left his belongings and asked where he had come from. These being forest people who knew the ways of the forest, when they saw him emerging from that vast wilderness at an unusual hour, they wanted to question him about it. He told them that, having begun at the southern end, he trekked all night through the forest without sleeping and now intended to continue wandering north. Astounded by this statement, they wanted to know how it was possible, for it was common knowledge that passing through there at night meant almost certain death in the jaws of a tiger. How had he managed to avoid the tigers? Had he come across no tigers during the night? Ācariya Chob admitted he had met some tigers, but said he hadn't been bothered by them. The villagers were reluctant to believe him because the ferocious man-eating tigers roaming that forest were renowned for waiting to ambush anyone caught there overnight. Only after he had explained the actual circumstances of his encounter with the tigers did they finally believe him, realizing that his miraculous powers were a special case, and not applicable to ordinary people.

Whether it is the spiritual path of the heart or the physical path through the forest, ignorance of the path we are on, the distances that must be traveled, and the potential dangers along the way are all obstacles to our progress. So we must depend on a knowledgeable guide to ensure our safety. We, who are journeying along the path toward safe, happy, prosperous circumstances now and in the future, should always keep this in mind. Just because we've always thought and acted in a certain way, we must not carelessly assume that it is necessarily the right way. In truth, our habitual ways of thinking and acting usually tend to be mistaken, continuously leading most of us down the wrong path.

During his life as a *dhutanga* monk, Ācariya Chob had many close encounters with wild animals. Once while wandering through Burma,⁵ he stopped to do his practice in a cave frequented by tigers. Although these huge beasts roamed freely through the area while he lived there, they never harmed him. So he never dreamed that one would actually

come looking for him. But then one afternoon at about five o'clock, as he was getting up from his meditation, his eyes glanced up to the mouth of the cave to see a huge, striped tiger approaching the entrance. It was an enormous animal and very frightening-looking; but Ācariya Chob remained unperturbed probably because he was so accustomed to seeing these creatures wherever he went. Peering into the cave, the tiger spied him just as he was looking up at it. Instead of showing alarm at the sight of him or roaring out in a terrifying manner, it just stood there passively, as though it were a house pet. It showed no signs of fear and made no threatening gestures. Looking casually about, the tiger leapt onto a large, flat rock at the entrance to the cave, about eighteen feet from where Ācariya Chob stood. Sitting nonchalantly, licking its paws, it seemed uninterested in him, though it knew perfectly well he was in the cave. It sat there calmly with the air of a pet dog sitting in front of the house. Growing tired, it flopped down, stretched out its legs, and lay there comfortably just like a pet dog, continuing to lick itself as though feeling right at home.

Since Ācariya Chob's meditation track was right in front of the cave, he didn't dare go out and walk there the proximity of the huge tiger made him feel a bit nervous. His uneasiness was compounded by the fact that he had never before seen a wild tiger behave like a household pet in this way. So he continued his sitting meditation on a small bamboo platform inside the cave, though with no sense of fear that the tiger might try to harm him there. Once in a long while it casually glanced at him in the nonchalant manner of an old friend, while lying contentedly with no evident intention of moving. Ācariya Chob expected it to eventually wander off, but it showed no interest in going anywhere.

At first, Ācariya Chob was sitting outside his mosquito net; but once darkness fell he moved inside the net and lit a candle. The tiger remained impassive as the candlelight illuminated the cave. It continued lying contentedly on the rock until late into the night, when Ācariya Chob finally lay down to take a rest. Awaking at about three a. m., he lit a candle only to find the tiger reclining impassively as before. After washing his face, he sat in meditation until the first light of dawn; then he rose from his seat and put away his mosquito net. Glancing up, he saw the tiger still stretched out comfortably, looking like some oversized pet dog in front of its master's house. Eventually, the time for his daily almsround arrived. The only way out of the cave went straight

past the tiger. He wondered what its reaction would be when he walked by. As he put on his robes he noticed the tiger looking at him with soft, gentle eyes like a dog looking wistfully at its master. Since he had no other alternative, he would have to pass within several feet of it on his way out. When he was ready, he approached the mouth of the cave and began speaking to the tiger:

"It's now time for my morning almsround. Like all other creatures in this world, I am hungry and need to fill my stomach. If it's okay with you, I'll go out and get some food. Please be kind enough to let me pass by. If you want to stay on here, that's fine with me. Or, if you prefer to go off searching for something to eat, that's all right too."

The tiger lay there listening to him with its head cocked like a dog listening to the voice of its master. As Ācariya Chob walked past, it watched him with a soft, gentle gaze as if to say: Go ahead, there's no need to be afraid. I've only come here to protect you from danger.

Ācariya Chob walked down to the local village for his almsround, but he didn't tell anyone about the tiger for fear they might try to kill it. Returning to the cave he looked at the place where the tiger had been, but there was no longer any sign of it. He had no idea where it had gone. During the remainder of his stay in that cave, it never came to visit him again.

Ācariya Chob suspected that the tiger was no ordinary forest creature but rather a creation of the *devas*,⁶ which is why it appeared so tame and unthreatening the entire time it was with him. He felt a lot of affection for it and so missed its presence for many days thereafter. He thought it might return from time to time to see him, but it never did. Although he heard the sounds of tigers roaring every night, he couldn't tell whether his friend was among them. In any case, the whole forest was teeming with tigers. A faint-hearted person could never have lived there, but he was not affected by such dangers. In fact, the tame-looking tiger, who kept watch over him all night, made him feel more affection than fear. Ācariya Chob said that experience increased his belief in Dhamma in quite a special way.

Ācariya Chob spent five years living in Burma, where he learned to speak Burmese as fluently as if it were his own language. The reason he

eventually returned to Thailand concerned the Second World War. The English and the Japanese were fighting each other all up and down the countryside in the towns, the villages, and even in the mountains. During that period, the English accused the Thai people of collaborating with the Japanese.⁷ Consequently, they searched for Thais in Burma, hunting them down with a vengeance. They summarily executed any Thai they found inside Burma, regardless of whether it was a man, a women, or a monk no exceptions were made.

The villagers that Ācariya Chob depended on for his daily alms loved and respected him; so when they saw the English soldiers being very meddlesome, they became concerned for his safety. They hurriedly took him deep into the mountains and hid him in a place where they decided the English would not be able to find him. But eventually a contingent of English soldiers did come across him there, just as he was giving a blessing to a group of villagers. The villagers were crestfallen. Questioned by the soldiers, Ācariya Chob told them that he had been living in Burma for a long time and was never involved in politics. He said that being a monk, he knew nothing about such matters. The villagers spoke up in his defense to say that, unlike lay people, monks had nothing to do with the war, so it would be wrong to try to involve him in any way. They warned the soldiers that, should they take any action against him, it would amount to hurting the feelings of the Burmese people who had done nothing wrong. It would unnecessarily damage relations with the local population, which would be a grave mistake. They assured the soldiers that he had been living there since long before the war began and knew nothing about international affairs. Even though their country was now in a state of war, the Burmese people did not view this monk as a threat of any kind. Thus, if the soldiers were to harm him, it would be tantamount to harming the whole of the Burmese nation. The Burmese people could never condone such an action.

The contingent of English soldiers stood talking among themselves about what to do with Ācariya Chob. After discussing his case for about half an hour, they told the villagers to quickly take him away to another location, for if another army patrol came and spotted him, there could be trouble. Should their pleas be rejected the next time, his life might well be in danger. While the soldiers were viewing him as an enemy, Ācariya Chob sat quietly, extending forth thoughts of loving kindness

and recollecting the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

When the soldiers had gone, the villagers took him deeper into the mountains, telling him not to come down to the village for almsround. Instead, each morning they secretly brought food for him to eat. From that day on, patrols of English troops regularly came to bother the villagers. Soon patrols were coming daily to ask the whereabouts of the Thai monk, and it became increasingly obvious that he would be killed if they found him. As the situation worsened, the villagers became more and more concerned for his safety. Finally, they decided to send him back to Thailand by way of a remote forest trail that passed through thick mountainous terrain. This trail was known to be safe from incursions by English patrols. They gave him detailed instructions on how to proceed, warning him to stick to the trail no matter what happened. Even if he found the trail overgrown in places, he was not to attempt a different route. It was an old footpath used for generations by the hill tribes that eventually led all the way to the Thai border.

Once he had these instructions, he began walking. He walked all day and all night without sleeping or eating, drinking only water. With great difficulty he made his way through this dense wilderness region teeming with all manner of wild animals. Everywhere he looked he saw tiger and elephant tracks. He feared he would never survive his flight from Burma; he was constantly worried that he might make one wrong turn on the trail and end up hopelessly lost in that vast wilderness.

On the morning of the fourth day of his trek to the Thai border, something incredibly amazing happened to Ācariya Chob. Please reserve judgment on this incident until you have read the whole story. As he crested the top of a mountain ridge, he was so extremely hungry and exhausted that he thought he couldn't possibly go on. By that time he had been walking for three days and three nights without any sleep or food. The only breaks he had taken were short periods of rest to alleviate the physical stress of such an arduous journey. While dragging his enfeebled body over the ridge, a thought arose in his mind: *I have walked the entire distance to this point risking my life with every breath I take, yet somehow I'm still alive. Since starting out I've yet to see a single human habitation where I could request alms food to sustain my life. Am I now going to die needlessly for lack of a single meal? I've*

suffered enormous hardships on this trip at no other time in my life have I suffered so much. Is it all going to be in vain? Have I escaped war, a sphere of death everyone fears, only to die of starvation and the hardships of this trek? If, as the Lord Buddha declared, there really are devas in the upper realms, possessing divine eyes and ears that can truly perceive at great distances, can't they see this monk who is about ready to die at any moment? I do believe what the Lord Buddha said. But are the devas, who have received kind assistance from so many monks, from the Buddha's time until the present day, really so heartless as this? If devas are not in fact hardhearted, then let them demonstrate their kindness to this dying monk so that their pure, celestial qualities can be admired.

No sooner had this thought occurred to Ñcariya Chob than something incredibly strange and amazing happened. It was almost impossible to believe. As he staggered along that remote mountain trail, he saw an elegantly dressed gentleman, who bore no resemblance to the hill tribes people of that region, quietly sitting at the side of the path, holding a tray of food offerings up to his head. It seemed impossible! Ñcariya Chob was so flabbergasted by what he saw that he got goose flesh and his hair stood on end. He forgot all about being hungry and exhausted. He was wholly astounded to see a kind-looking gentleman sitting beside the path about twenty-five feet ahead waiting to offer him food. As he approached, the gentleman spoke to him:

"Please, sir, rest here awhile and eat something to relieve your hunger and fatigue. Once you've regained your strength, you can continue on. You're sure to reach the other side of this vast wilderness some time today."

Ñcariya Chob stopped, put down what few requisites he was carrying, and prepared his alms bowl to receive the food that the gentleman was offering. He then stepped forward and accepted the food. To his amazement, as soon as the food items were placed in his bowl, a sweet fragrance seemed to permeate the whole surrounding forest. The amount of food he was offered by the gentleman was exactly the right amount to satisfy his needs. And it had an exquisite taste that was absolutely indescribable. This might seem like an extravagant exaggeration, but the truth of what his senses perceived at that moment was so amazing as to be virtually impossible to describe.

When the gentleman finished putting food in his bowl, Ācariya Chob asked him where his house was located. He said that he had been walking for three nights and four days now but had yet to see a single human habitation. The gentleman pointed vaguely upward, saying his house was over there. Ācariya Chob asked what had prompted him to prepare food and then wait along that trail to offer it to a monk. How had he known in the first place that there would be a monk coming to receive it? The gentleman smiled slightly, but didn't speak. Ācariya Chob gave him a blessing, after which the gentleman told him that he would have to leave since his house was some distance away. He appeared to be quite different from the average person in that he was remarkably dignified while speaking very little. He looked to be a middle-aged man of medium height with a radiant complexion and behavior that was impeccably self-composed. Having taken his leave, he stood up and began to walk away. As he was obviously an unusual man, Ācariya Chob observed him carefully. He walked about twenty-five feet, stepped behind a tree, and disappeared from sight. Ācariya Chob stared at the tree waiting for him to reappear on the other side, but he never did. This was even more puzzling; so he stood up and walked over to the tree to have a closer look but no one was there. Had someone been in that area, he would definitely have seen him. But looking around in all directions he saw no one. The strange circumstances of the man's disappearance surprised him all the more.

Still puzzled, Ācariya Chob walked back and began to eat his food. Tasting the various foods he had been given, he found them to be unlike the human cuisine that he was used to eating. All the food was wonderfully fragrant and flavorful, and perfectly suited to his bodily needs in every possible way. He had never eaten anything like it. The food's exquisite taste permeated throughout every pore in his body which had so long been oppressed by hunger and fatigue. In the end, he wasn't sure if it was his extreme hunger that made it taste so good or the celestial nature of the food itself. He ate every last morsel of what was offered, and it turned out to be exactly the right amount to fill his stomach. Had there been even a little extra, he would have been unable to finish it.

Having eaten, he set off again feeling incredibly robust and radiant, not at all like the person who was at death's door a short while before. Walking along he became so absorbed in thinking about the mysterious

gentleman that he forgot about the rigors of the journey, the distance he had to walk, and whether or not he was on the right trail. As evening fell, he emerged from the other side of that vast wilderness just as the mysterious gentleman had predicted. He crossed the border into Thailand with the same feeling of joy that he had been experiencing all day. The mental and physical distress that had tormented him earlier in his journey had disappeared after his morning repast. When he finally crossed into Thailand, the land of his birth, he knew for certain that he was going to live.

He said that the strange gentleman he met was surely a devic being and not one of the local inhabitants. Think about it: From the point where he met that gentleman to the point where he entered Thailand, he encountered not a single human habitation. The whole affair was very puzzling. Ordinarily, one would expect to meet with at least a small settlement of some sort along the whole of that route through Burma.

As it turned out, his evasion of the army patrols had been so successful that he had encountered neither people nor food. It had been so successful that he had nearly starved to death.

Ācariya Chob said that his almost miraculous escape from death in that vast wilderness caused him to suspect the involvement of divine intervention. Although the wilderness he passed through teemed with dangerous wild animals like tigers, elephants, bears, and snakes, he did never encounter them. The only animals he came across were harmless ones. Normally, someone trekking through such a wilderness would encounter dangerous wild animals daily, especially tigers and elephants. And there was a very strong possibility that that person might be killed by one of those savage beasts. Surely his own safe passage can be attributed to the miraculous properties of Dhamma, or miraculous intervention by the *devas*, or both. The villagers who helped him escape were very concerned that he would not survive the threat posed by dangerous wild animals, but there had been no other choice. Had he remained in Burma, the threat posed by the war and the English soldiers was even more imminent. So opting for the lesser of two evils, they had helped him escape from the land of bloodthirsty people, hoping that he would survive the savage beasts and enjoy a long life. Which is why he was forced to make the perilous trek that nearly cost him his life.

Please contemplate these mysterious happenings for yourself. I have recorded the stories just as I heard them. But being reluctant to pass judgment on them alone, I would prefer that you come to your own conclusions. Still, I cannot help but feel amazed that something so seemingly impossible actually occurred. Due to the rigorous nature of Ācariya Chob's *dhutanga kammaāhāna* lifestyle, he has had many other similar experiences, for he always prefers living and practicing in remote wilderness areas. Since he lives deep in the forest, few people dare to go visit him, so his involvement with society is very limited.

Conclusion

Practicing monks in the lineage of Ācariya Mun tend to prefer living in mountains and forests. Leading the way in this lifestyle himself, Ācariya Mun encouraged all his disciples to do the same. By nature, he was fond of praising the virtues of life in the wilds. He said the reason he preferred such places was that knowledge and understanding of Dhamma was much more likely to arise while he lived in remote forest areas than while staying in congested ones. Crowded, congested places are hardly conducive to calm and contentment in the practice of Dhamma. Even the Dhamma that his disciples are teaching today was earned practicing at the threshold of death in that same wilderness environment.

In the physical sense, Ācariya Mun died many years ago. Nevertheless, disciples of his who naturally possess the meditative ability to perceive such phenomena still regularly experience visual images of him arising spontaneously in their meditation, just as if he were still alive. Should one of them experience a problem in his practice, a visual image of Ācariya Mun will appear to him while he is meditating, demonstrating effective ways to solve the problem. He appears to be sitting there in person giving advice, much in the same way that past Arahants came and instructed him on the various occasions I mentioned earlier. When a monk, whose practice has reached a certain level, finds a specific problem that he cannot solve himself, a visual image of Ācariya Mun appears and advises him on that very question, and then disappears on its own. After that, the monk takes the teaching that Ācariya Mun has given him, analyzes it carefully and uses it to the best of his ability. And thus he gains new insights in his meditation practice.

Those monks who are naturally inclined to perceive external phenomena possess the necessary psychic ability to receive such advice on their practice. This is known as 'listening to Dhamma by way of *nimittas* appearing in meditation'. That is, the teacher presents his teaching in the form of a *nimitta*, while the disciple understands that teaching as he perceives the *nimitta*. This may seem rather mysterious to those who have never heard about it or experienced it for themselves. Some people may reject such psychic communication out of hand as being sheer nonsense; but in truth, it does occur. Practicing monks having a natural psychic inclination perceive various external phenomena in the same manner. However, this talent is not shared by all practicing monks. Rather, individuals possessing this capability are special cases, meaning they have previously developed the specific virtuous qualities suited to such psychic achievements. For instance, the Buddha and the Arahants appeared in Ācariya Mun's meditation as *nimittas*, so he was able to hear their teachings in that way. Similarly, disciples of Ācariya Mun, who possessed similar psychic tendencies, were able to perceive *nimittas* of him, or of the Buddhas and the Arahants, and so hear their teachings. In principle, it can be compared to the *nimitta* that the Lord Buddha used to teach his mother when she resided in the *Tāvatiyya* heavenly realm. But the Lord Buddha constitutes a very exceptional case, one which people consent to believe in far more readily than that of someone less exalted, even though both share the same causal basis which makes it difficult to further elaborate on this matter.

Being reluctant to write any more on this subject, I leave it up to those practicing meditation to discover this knowledge for themselves *paccattay* which is better than relying on someone else's explanation, and far more certain as well. I am wholly convinced of this. No matter what is being discussed, without having the ability to perceive such things directly with our own senses, we will be reluctant to simply rely on another person's description of them. Although that person may provide us with accurate information, there will always be certain aspects that we are bound to doubt or take exception to, notwithstanding the fact that the person is compassionately explaining the matter to us with a pure heart. The problem is: we ordinary people are not pure ourselves so we tend to balk at what we hear, hesitant to accept someone else's judgment. So it is better that we experience these

things for ourselves. Only then can we truly accept their validity. Then we needn't annoy others with our remonstrations. As the Buddha said: *All of us must accept the consequences of our own actions. We shoulder the burden of pain and suffering and enjoy the fruits of happiness that we have created for ourselves.* This is absolutely right and beautifully simple too.

The story of Ācariya Mun is a splendid story. Beginning from the time he was still in lay life, he demonstrated the characteristics of a true sage. Always conducting himself in a safe, steady manner, he was never known to have caused any disgrace or undue trouble to his parents or relatives. Having ordained as a monk, he strove relentlessly to develop firm principles within himself and so became a spiritual refuge to monks, novices, and lay people for the rest of his long life. He was a man whose life was a bright, shining example from beginning to end _ a life of virtue that should definitely be considered an excellent model for people in this day and age. His meditation methods were extremely rigorous, his spiritual development of the highest caliber. The *kilesas* never had a chance to overrun his heart, for he systematically destroyed them until not a single one remained. So much so that he was acknowledged by his close disciples and those revering him to be a present-day Arahant.

The spiritual benefits that he bestowed upon the world were always in line with the principles of mindfulness and wisdom from the initial stages of practice to the very highest level, his teaching never deviated from the true way of Dhamma. Internally, he was very astute at judging the character and temperament of his students. Externally, he was very clever in the way he gave assistance to people in every strata of society, from simple hill tribes people to urban intellectuals. Even when nearing death, he did not abandon his natural compassion for others. When a student with a problem in his practice went to seek assistance, he kindly made an effort to discuss the issue until all doubts had been allayed. All his disciples received some piece of farewell advice from him to carry in their hearts forever. Having been fortunate enough to meet such a supreme individual and having wholeheartedly accepted him as their one true refuge, they were confident that they had not lived their lives in vain. Many of his senior disciples were able to establish themselves firmly in the principles of Dhamma. By virtue of their own spiritual development, they also became *ācariyas* passing on the teaching to

their students, thus assuring that the Supreme Noble wealth of the Lord Buddha does not disappear. Many of his more junior disciples are still alive today serving as a strong base for the *sāsa* into the foreseeable future. Though they may not openly demonstrate it, many of them possess excellent Dhamma credentials. Every one of these monks was inspired by the magic quality of Ācariya Mun's compassionate teaching.

As a teacher, Ācariya Mun was unrivaled in his ability to help develop the spiritual potential of members of the lay community, enabling them to grasp the significance of Dhamma and the basic moral principles of cause and effect, which are universal principles governing the world. Spiritual development means developing the one factor that is absolutely central to the well-being of the world. The world comes to ruin only if people's spiritual values come to ruin first. When spiritual values deteriorate, then everything people do becomes just another means of destroying the world and subverting Dhamma. When people's hearts are well trained in spiritual values, their speech and actions become an effective means of promoting the world's prosperity. So inevitably Dhamma flourishes as well. How could people who have sincerely developed the way of Dhamma in their hearts possibly turn around and act ruinously, showing no compunction? Such behavior would be unnatural to them unless of course they simply memorize the principles of Dhamma, reciting them by heart without ever making an effort to develop those spiritual values within their hearts.

Ācariya Mun invariably made a deep impression on the people who met him. Those who sincerely respected him were willing to offer their lives to him unconditionally. Whether it be matters of good or matters of evil, once such concerns are embraced and taken to heart they then exert a powerful influence on that person, one no other force in the world can match. Were this not the case, people would not have the self-assurance to act upon their intentions be they good, or evil. It is precisely because they take such matters to heart that they can act boldly upon them. Having assumed this attitude, the outcome becomes inevitable.

This was especially evident among practicing monks who revered Ācariya Mun. By taking the Dhamma that he taught to heart, those monks became uncompromising in their respect for him. The power of

their belief in him was so strong that they would even dare to sacrifice their precious lives for him. But although they could have given their lives without difficulty, their strong faith in him was never sacrificed. It was this extraordinary magnetic quality he possessed that so attracted people and engendered such veneration in them, both during his lifetime and after he passed away.

As for myself, well, I have always been a rather hopeless individual, so my sentiments are very different from most people's. Although over twenty years has elapsed since his death, to me it feels as if Ācariya Mun passed away only yesterday. And though his body died at that time, his *citta* seems never to have passed away. I feel he is always here with me, helping me continually.

As a concluding chapter to his biography, I would like to present a representative sample of the teachings Ācariya Mun gave, beginning with comments he made at the onset of his final illness and ending with his last instructions to the monks teachings which have continued to make a profound impression on me ever since. The Dhamma he presented to the monks at the start of his illness took the form of a warning to them that the illness had begun a process of uprooting the very source of his physical existence, including all his bodily functions, which were destined to steadily deteriorate, break down, and finally fail altogether. He began:

"I have been investigating matters concerning the life and death of this body for nearly sixty years now and I have found nothing in the physical *khandha* that is worthy of the least attachment or that would cause me to regret its passing away. I ceased to have doubts about such things the moment I realized Dhamma's Supreme Truth. Whether they exist inside of the body or outside of it, all material substances are composed of the same physical elements. They gradually break down and decompose with each passing day, and thus are always reverting back to their fundamental natural state. Although we imagine the body belonging to us, in truth it is just a conglomeration of physical elements that are commonly found everywhere on this earth.

"What most concerns me now is my students who have come here from all over the country. I worry that you will not have gained a firm basis of Dhamma in your hearts before I pass away. That is why I have

always warned you against being complacent about the *kilesas*, which are the source of an endless procession of births and deaths. Never assume that the *kilesas* are insignificant, or somehow harmless, and thus fail to tackle them seriously while the time is still right. Once death overtakes you, it will be impossible to take any action against them. Don't say I didn't warn you!

"Every human being and animal on this planet suffers *dukkha* as a matter of course. Don't misunderstand the cause of this suffering: it is caused by those very *kilesas* that you seem to think are so insignificant and harmless. I have examined the origins of birth, death and suffering with all the mindfulness and wisdom at my disposal. Only one cause induces the hearts of living beings to seek a place in the realm of birth and death experiencing various degrees of pain and suffering, and that cause is the *kilesas* that people everywhere overlook. In truth, they are the principal instigators. All of you who have *kilesas* ruling over your hearts, what is your attitude? Do you also consider them unimportant? If so, then no matter how long you live under my guidance, you will always be like the ladle in a pot of delicious stew. If you want to be able to taste the flavor of that stew, then you must listen with keen interest to the Dhamma that I teach you and fully take it to heart. Don't act like ladles and obstruct my teaching by failing to appreciate its value. Otherwise, you will live and die having nothing of value to show for it. Which is worse than being animals, whose flesh and skins are at least of some value when they die. Heedless people are always worthless _ alive or dead.

"Since this illness began, I have reminded you constantly that I am slowly dying, day by day. When a person transcends *dukkha* he is perfectly satisfied in every respect, and so he dies free of all concerns. Forever unblemished, he has nothing further to attain, for nothing is missing from his sense of perfect satisfaction. But someone who dies while under the influence of the *kilesas*, which are never satisfied, will find the same sense of dissatisfaction clinging to his heart wherever he is reborn. The stronger the influence of the *kilesas*, the more intense the *dukkha* he will suffer. Don't imagine this or that realm of existence will be a pleasant, joyful place to be reborn in when you die. Such thoughts are merely an indication that craving and dissatisfaction are disturbing your hearts before you've even died. Which means you are still unwilling to view the *kilesas* as enemies that constantly stir up trouble

in your hearts. With that attitude, where will you ever find happiness and contentment? If you cannot rid yourselves of the desire to be reborn in the future, then I am at a loss as to how I can help you.

"Monks who have yet to develop the calm and concentration of *samādhi* within themselves should not expect to find peace and contentment in the world; instead, they will encounter only the frustration that is hidden inside their agitated hearts. You must hurry to remedy this situation now by developing an effective means to counter such agitation. By being diligent, courageous, and persevering in your struggle with the *kilesas* which are always antagonistic to Dhamma you will soon discover the peaceful nature of genuine tranquillity arising in your hearts. With persistence, results will come quickly; especially when compared with the endless amount of time you have spent wandering through *saṃsāra* from one type of existence to another.

"The teachings of the Lord Buddha are all designed for the purpose of helping those who believe what he taught to gradually transcend *dukkha*, step by step, until they finally reach the stage where they will never again return to this world of repeated birth and death. Those who desire not to return to birth must analyze every aspect of existence in the entire universe, from the grossest to the most subtle, in terms of the three basic characteristics of all existence *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* and use wisdom to thoroughly investigate each aspect until all doubts have been eliminated. Once that happens, even strong attachments⁸ that are difficult to break will evaporate and disappear in the blink of an eye. All that's needed to cut through those oppressive doubts is wisdom that is sharp and incisive. In all the three worlds of existence there is no more effective, up-to-date means for confronting the *kilesas* than the combination of mindfulness and wisdom. The Lord Buddha and all the Arahants employed mindfulness and wisdom to counteract every kind of *kilesa* no other means was used. The Lord Buddha himself endorsed the unrivaled supremacy of mindfulness and wisdom as weapons for combating the *kilesas*. This is not meant to belittle the value of other spiritual qualities, but they perform an auxiliary role like provisions of food used to support and maintain the fighting strength of soldiers in battle. It is the soldiers and their weapons, however, that are indispensable to the war effort. By soldiers, I mean those who are absolutely determined never to retreat in the face of the *kilesas* and thus slide back into the mire of birth and death where these defilements can

ridicule them once more. The premier weapons of choice are mindfulness and wisdom. Being effective at every level of combat, they should always remain close at hand.

"The points in the course of your practice where the *citta* gets stuck, are the points you must examine fearlessly without concern that the intensity of your efforts to dismantle the cycle of rebirth will somehow prove fatal. When you face the moment of death, I want you to die victorious. Don't allow yourself to die defeated or else you will continue to suffer for a long time to come. You must make every effort to fight on until *saṃsāra* becomes a completely deserted place. Try it! Is it really possible that *saṃsāra* will become deserted, due to lack of deluded people taking birth there, simply because you put forth effort in your practice? Why are you so worried about returning to occupy a place in *saṃsāra*? You haven't even died, yet every thought arising in your mind is directed toward reserving a future existence for yourself. Why is that? Whenever you reduce your efforts in practice, you are automatically working hard to reserve a place in the continuing cycle of birth and death. Consequently, birth and death are always bound up with your heart and your heart is always bound up with *dukkha*.

"I have made every effort to teach you the way of Dhamma, candidly revealing everything that you should know about the Four Noble Truths and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. I have withheld only certain aspects of Dhamma dealing with specific kinds of psychic perception that are not directly connected with enlightenment, such as those special insights that I have alluded to from time to time. I am always glad to listen to anyone who experiences such perceptions and assist them in any way I can. Once I have died, it will be very difficult to find someone who can advise you on these matters. You must keep in mind that the practice of Dhamma differs considerably from the theory of Dhamma.⁹ Those who have not actually attained *samādhi* and *paññā*, or *magga*, *phala*, and Nibbāna, cannot possibly teach others the correct way to reach these attainments."

Ācariya Mun concluded his *pacchima ovāda*¹⁰ by emphasizing the importance of *sankhāradhamma*, just as the Lord Buddha had done in his final instructions to the community of monks prior to his *Parinibbāna*. Ācariya Mun began by paraphrasing the Buddha's instructions: *Monks, heed my words. All sankhāra dhammas are subject*

to change. They arise, evolve, decay, and then pass away, so you should always remain diligent in your practice. He then explained the essential meaning of this passage.

"The word `sankhāra' in the Lord Buddha's *pacchima ovāda* refers to the highest Dhamma. He gathered together all conditioned things in the word `sankhāra', but he wished at that time to emphasize the internal *sankhāras* above all others.¹¹ He wanted the monks to see that these *sankhāras* are important because they are *samudaya* the cause of *dukkha*. They are the factors that disturb the *citta*, causing it to languish in a state of delusion where it never experiences a tranquil, independent existence. If we investigate such *sankhāras* being all of our thoughts and concepts from the most vulgar to the most refined until we fully comprehend their true nature, they will then come to an end. When *sankhāras* come to an end, nothing remains to disturb the *citta*. Although thoughts and ideas do still arise to some extent, they merely follow the natural inclination of the *khandhas khandhas* that are now pure and unadulterated. They no longer conceal any form of *kilesa*, *tañhā*, or *avijjā*. Comparing it to sleep, it is equivalent to a deep, dreamless sleep. In this case, the *citta* is referred to a `vīpasama citta'; that is, a tranquil *citta* completely devoid of all remnants of the *kilesas*. The *citta* of the Lord Buddha and those of all the Arahants were of just such a nature, so they harbored no aspirations to attain anything further. The moment the *kilesas* are extinguished within the *citta*, a state of purity arises in their place. This is called *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*.¹² That is the precise moment when the attainment of Arahant occurs an absolutely amazing pure essence of mind for which no comparison can be found in all the three worlds of existence."

Upon reaching this point, Ācariya Mun stopped speaking and retired to rest. From that day onward he never gave another discourse to the monks, which is why I have called it his *pacchima ovāda*. It is a very fitting note on which to conclude his biography.

As the author, I have done my utmost to write a thorough and accurate account of Ācariya Mun's life. I feel it to be a once-in-a-lifetime endeavor. I have written down the whole story as meticulously and as eloquently as I possibly could. Should there be any inaccuracies in what I've written, I trust you will forgive my shortcomings. I have spent a considerable amount of time attempting to record the story of his life

from beginning to end. But even if I were to continue writing for another three years, I could never encompass it all. Although I would like to write as much as possible for the sake of my readers who never had a chance to meet him, my ability to recollect and transcribe the events comprising Ñacariya Mun's life has now been exhausted. Still, many people may now read his biography, learning how he practiced and trained himself from the day of his ordination to the day he passed away. At least the story of his life is available to the interested reader, even though it is by no means a complete picture of Ñacariya Mun and his extraordinary achievements.

In compiling this biography, I have tried very hard to select only those aspects of his life and teaching that I felt would be of greatest benefit to the average reader. At the same time, I have omitted any aspect that I felt would serve no definite purpose. Of the relevant material which was collected to write this book, approximately seventy percent has been included in the text you've just read. That much I felt was neither too deep nor too confusing for the reader's understanding. The remaining thirty percent was excluded because I felt those aspects of Ñacariya Mun's life and teaching would be difficult to present in a way that's easy to read and understand. I was concerned they wouldn't benefit the reader enough to justify their inclusion. Thus they were omitted, though often with some reluctance. Even then, I'm not wholly comfortable with some of the things I have included in the book, though they do faithfully represent the truth of what Ñacariya Mun said. I managed to resist the urge to exclude them, however; yet, I could not bring myself to write about certain other matters, and for this reason they were left out.

Ñacariya Mun's story, with all its many remarkable facets, tells of a truly beautiful life that is full of subtlety and grace. It would certainly be difficult finding someone to equal him nowadays. If his life were fully narrated in every detail, then it probably would not differ significantly from the lives of those Arahants who attained such mastery in the time of the Buddha. Listening to him explain various aspects of Dhamma, including the countless variety of external phenomena he contacted, I was truly amazed by his incredible mastery. When he proclaimed that impressive Dhamma for us to hear, it seemed as though he was speaking on behalf of the Lord Buddha and his gifted Arahant disciples.

We could almost picture the Buddha and his disciples sitting right in front of us and bathing our hearts with the pure waters of Dhamma.

Were I to attempt to describe each and every facet of Ñcariya Mun's knowledge and understanding, I would feel ashamed of my own inadequacies in this regard ashamed of being a forest monk in appearance only, a phony who has somehow encroached upon the *sāsana*. Through my own ignorance I might inadvertently damage his excellent reputation, which should be preserved at all costs. Although I stated at the beginning of the book that I intended to write in the style of the Venerable Ñcariyas of antiquity, who transcribed the lives of the Lord Buddha and his Arahant disciples, I can't help feeling embarrassed that I am not so gifted as they were. Nevertheless, I have done the best I could. Should this somewhat imperfect biography fall short of your expectations, please be so kind as to forgive my shortcomings.

It is appropriate now to bring this biography to a close. If the account I have written contains any inaccuracies or misrepresentations, I respectfully ask forgiveness of Ñcariya Mun who, like a loving father, gave birth to my faith in Dhamma. May the power of his all-encompassing love and compassion always bring peace and happiness to people everywhere. May you all have sufficient faith and resources of merit to follow in his footsteps, practicing the Dhamma that he taught to your ultimate satisfaction. May Thailand enjoy continual, uninterrupted prosperity and remain free of enemies and natural disasters. And may the Thai people remain untroubled by misfortune and hardship, forever experiencing happiness and contentment in harmony with the Buddhasāsana.

Should my presentation of Ñcariya Mun's life be deemed inappropriate in any way, either in terms of the subject matter or the style in which it was written, I do sincerely apologize. I hope you will make allowances for my forest background, for it's difficult to transform the natural character of a forest monk into something eloquent and sophisticated. Though I have attempted to present every aspect of Ñcariya Mun's life in a suitable, accurate fashion, I must confess that my own disorderly tendencies are hopelessly incurable. In writing a book of this nature, there will inevitably be some inconsistencies that may confuse the reader _ which is why I have been at pains to stress my shortcomings.

Before the life history of Ācariya Mun could come to a successful conclusion in my own mind, I had to carefully contemplate the whole matter for a long time. This prompted me to go around recording the recollections of many *ācariyas* who have lived with him at various times in the past. To this I added my own memories of what he told me about his life. It took me many years to gather all the strands of his story and weave them into a creditable whole. Be that as it may, my often confusing style of writing, plus the fact that so many events appear out of sequence, will probably confound the reader.

I accept full responsibility for everything in this biography. As I feel somewhat guilty about my own incompetence in this endeavor, I shall be glad to entertain your critical comments. At the same time, I shall be pleased to receive any complimentary remarks with the satisfaction of knowing that this book has been of some small benefit to those who read it. May all the merit gained from this work be fully credited to the readers and to those who helped to make the book possible. Should I deserve a portion by virtue of being the author, I ask to share it with every one of you who venerate the memory of Ācariya Mun. May we all share this merit equally.

Finally, may the Supreme Merit of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha plus the great virtue of Ācariya Mun and whatever virtue I may possess _ may everything sacred in the world watch over and protect all my readers as well as the editors of Srisapada Publishing. The folks at Srisapada worked tirelessly in their efforts to bring this biography to fruition, struggling to print a manuscript that was sent to them in numerous installments. Never once did they complain about the difficulties and inconveniences associated with this project or with any of the other issues on which I requested their assistance. May they all be free of sickness and misfortune, enjoying only prosperity and contentment now and in the future. And may their aspirations in the sphere of Dhamma be fulfilled to their ultimate satisfaction.

October 1971 ॐ

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