

# ***Samādhi is Not an Option***

***Talk on the 8th of December 2006***

You must understand that it's necessary to go through the fires of hell in order to reach the ocean of happiness. There is no other way; we have to go through the fire – pain, *dukkha* (discontent), torture, hardship – to reach the safe shore of supreme happiness. The Lord Buddha himself fainted three times because of the extreme pain and so did Than Acharn Mun. Than Acharn Mahā Bua also came very close to fainting and I have had a similar experience. If you don't wage war against the *kilesas* that grab your heart and cause all your suffering, you will not be able to uproot greed, hate and *avijjā* from your *citta* (heart–mind). These things are very deeply rooted in all our hearts, so to get them out we need to endure some pain and *dukkha*.

*Mettā* is translated as loving kindness. You all have your own ideas about what loving kindness is, and probably have the idea that someone with loving kindness should be 'nice' and behave sympathetically. But consider this: imagine that the whole world is addicted to opium and that everyone seems happy because they have the drug. The opium is called *avijjā* (fundamental ignorance). People go on and on, round and round in *samsāra* forever, and are willing to keep going round as long as they have their opium. Then, a wise teacher comes along and sees that opium is not a good thing. How will people react when he tries to take their opium pipes away? Would they think he has a lot of *mettā*? No, they'd think he was cruel, even though giving up opium would be to their great benefit. This is one analogy. Another is that your body is covered in painful thorns, and a wise person realises that these thorns are full of a poison that makes you fall asleep. The thorns will need to come out, but this will hurt initially and will continue to be painful until the wounds heal. Unless you know he is helping, would you think he has a lot of *mettā*? No. In the case of a doctor, we all know that he is trying to help so we bear some pain and allow him to do his work. Once the pain has gone, we will be grateful. On the spiritual path, however, it's very difficult to know what our 'spiritual doctor' is doing. He seems to be inflicting a lot of pain on us. He doesn't seem to have any *mettā* for us. Why doesn't he smile at us?

I have been in this monastery for 11 years, and for the first six or seven years my own venerable teacher Than Acharn Mahā Bua never once smiled at me. Instead, he was always stepping on my toes; whenever I was doing something wrong, he pointed it out and stepped on my toes. At that time I didn't think he had a lot of *mettā*. When I did the same things that the other monks were doing, he didn't catch the other monks, but he caught me and told me off. So, he always put me on the spot, he never gave me a smile, there was never a grin hidden in his face. He was very, very serious, "I don't want to see that you do that kind of thing". It took me years of questioning myself and other more senior monks to discover that this was exactly the kind of *mettā* Than Acharn Mahā Bua had for his disciples. He pointed out the things that were unwholesome within ourselves so we could get rid of them. He didn't point out the good things; he didn't show that side. Of course, I'm only talking about the relationship of Than Acharn Mahā Bua to his bhikkhus (monks). He was very different with laypeople because in their case he did not have any responsibility for their individual spiritual welfare – they come and go, and he can joke with them, whereas he is responsible for the spiritual welfare of the monks. So, it took me six or seven years to understand that, in fact, he had much more *mettā* for me than for other people, because he stepped only on my toes and on the toes of a few

other people. He corrected me whenever I was doing something wrong. For instance, I would try to be very mindful for four or five days, and he never approached me or seemed to care, but if I got slack in my practice, he would suddenly appear to correct me not to do it again. This kind of *mettā* is different from our usual view of it; we normally think that *mettā* involves someone smiling, cheering and giving encouragement all the time, but that would be giving sugar-coated poison.

Than Acharn Mahā Bua calls the *kilesas* ‘sugar-coated poison’, sweet to taste but with a poison that has very long-lasting, deep and bitter after-effects. He always pointed out the dangers, the dangers that lead us to fall into the *kilesas*’ trap. So, perhaps you should revise your view of *mettā*. Someone who scolds you or steps on your toes is not necessarily lacking in *mettā*. In the long run, whether they have had *mettā* or not is shown by the cure; the process of becoming cured is painful and slow, but in the end you will be very pleased and very grateful that he didn’t just look away, that he always looked when you were doing something wrong. Finally, after seven years, when I went to see him and talk about my practice, I got the first smile; he was satisfied with what I had achieved. But it took a long time. You come here for two, three, four weeks or a few months, and then you leave because the *dukkha* and torture is too much. You feel you have to go to another place, see another teacher and experience other things. For a monk it is different. For the first five years, he has to stay with his teacher without being able to go where he likes. He cannot leave the monastery without asking permission from his teacher, and a strict teacher like Than Acharn Mahā Bua will say no. For instance, if you ask to go into town to see a doctor, he may give permission but say that you don’t need to come back. So, strictness with the *kilesas* and *avijjā* is the only thing that can help; we cannot fool around. Than Acharn Mahā Bua was the best example of a person who would not let the *kilesas* get a finger-hold, who simply would not let his disciples go in the wrong direction. He ensured that we would go in the direction leading to happiness, and not deviate from it. If one has the endurance to stay with such a teacher, in the end one realises that he is one of the best doctors around because he can cure the patient. He can cure you of these obstinate *kilesas* that constantly bring us trouble.

I want all of you to reach the state of happiness, the basis of practice, the basis of *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is peacefulness, happiness, one-pointedness where all the problems in the universe dissolve for a certain amount of time. There are three kinds of *samādhi*, and the first is *khaṇika* (momentary) *samādhi* when the *citta* drops down into the deep state of *samādhi*, perhaps for just a few seconds, and then comes back. When it comes back, it normally lands in *upacāra* (access) *samādhi*, the second type of *samādhi* in which thoughts cease for a while. In *upacāra samādhi*, the mind gathers in concentration while still seeing and experiencing the surrounding world. It’s a though you are in the midst of a storm with thunder, lightning and rain, and come to a glass house that you can enter and close the door behind. You feel safe for the first time; access *samādhi* is like entering a safe place, knowing all the things that are happening around you but having the feeling that they are somewhere at the periphery and cannot touch you any more. When there is pain, it doesn’t touch you; you just see things as they are. It’s a whole new world. One can talk about *upacāra samādhi* for the rest of one’s life, and still not fully describe it, there are so many different kinds of experiences people can have. It is called access *samādhi* because one can have access to all the different worlds, the 31 planes of existence. If you know the pathway, you can go to hell, the heavens, the ghost realm, and so on. It’s not difficult for us to attain access *samādhi*, a safe haven within us, a place to rest when we need to. We really need to develop access *samādhi*; if we do not, sooner or later we will be lost, because we will still be

swayed by the power of the *kilesas* demanding that we do this or that to get relief from pain. If we develop the path that leads to this kind of *samādhi*, then we shall always have a haven where we can rest; it's like having a bed where we can rest our head and forget the world for a while. When we come out of access *samādhi*, the world is the same as before we entered, but we know that we have been in a safe place. I want to make this extremely clear – access *samādhi* is something we *must* develop. It's not something to read about in books; it happens within our own *citta*, our own heart, and we access it within our own hearts. It's a must; it's not an option; we must reach it!

The third type of *samādhi* is *appanā samādhi*, the deep state of *samādhi*. Here, the mind gathers into one-pointedness even more. Initially, we start with our meditation object, such as the *parikamma* word *buddho* or the breath. The breath becomes so subtle that we think we have stopped breathing, or the *buddho* becomes so fixed that we cannot even think one more *buddho*. When this happens, the mind is so fixed that it has only one way to go – to one-pointedness. Normally, whatever we see in this world consists of 'I' and 'you', subject and object. In one-pointedness there is no subject and no object; the whole world of duality collapses, and people who have this experience call it a wonder. The whole universe of duality collapses into one-pointedness, and everything just disappears. The body and the whole world disappears from our senses, and what is left is the knowing nature of the *citta*. Than Acharn Mahā Bua calls it the *nibbāna* of the little man. Why little man? Because everyone who puts in their effort can reach it; nothing stands in the way. This is why I said at the beginning that if we don't go through the fires of hell we shall never reach the supreme happiness. If we are not able to force our mind into one-pointedness – which means going through the fires of hell – then we shall not reach it. Than Acharn Mahā Bua has described his own experience of his first three days of this practice. He had the determination not to let go of the word *buddho* from the moment he opened his eyes until the time he closed them again, and the first three days were hell. The mind wanted to go out here and there, but he did not give in. If he had not gone through hell, he would never have reached the deep state of *samādhi*, and he would not have been able to develop *samādhi* to the extent that he got stuck there for five years. When he came out of *samādhi*, he went in again, and out and in again. He said that there was not a day during this period when he did not go into *samādhi*. Eventually, his teacher Than Acharn Mun told him that he had remained long enough in *samādhi*, and that it was now the time to develop wisdom. So, for all of us on the path of practice, *samādhi* is a must, whether it's access *samādhi* or *appanā samādhi*. For those of you who want to go all the way to *nibbāna*, *appanā samādhi* is the state to reach in the beginning, so you can see what it will be like to actually achieve the goal. It's the *nibbāna* of the little man, a preview of *nibbāna*. The only difference is that in *nibbāna* the five khandas have gone whereas in the deep state of *samādhi* the khandas are still in the background.

So, we have to do whatever it takes to get into *samādhi*. In Than Acharn Mahā Bua's case, he was not willing to give in for three days and three nights, keeping his attention on the word *buddho* without letting his mind go out for a single moment. If he hadn't gone through that hell, he would not have found the supreme happiness and peacefulness of this state of *samādhi*. We need the rest, the power, the concentration of *samādhi* on the path of investigation leading to wisdom. If we have a blunt knife and try to chop down a tree, we can work for the rest of our lives without cutting it down. But if the mind is very sharp, great progress can be made in cutting down the tree of *avijjā*. Don't forget this; *samādhi*, the ability to concentrate, combined with *sati*, the ability to have mindfulness and awareness, are essentials for the development of wisdom. Imagine that you've caught a fish, and want to put it into the frying pan. You have to cut off the head, but unless you grab it very tightly it will wriggle out of your hand, and

you will have to catch it again and again. You could spend the rest of your life trying to catch the fish. In this case, fish are nothing more than the *kilesas*. You grab them but you don't hold them tightly enough to be able to cut off their heads. Please be clear about this; the path to deliverance is the path of *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* and *paññā* (wisdom) – *sīla* is keeping the five precepts, and *samādhi* is the ability to concentrate so you can rest, gain energy and develop mindfulness. Mindfulness is not just being conscious of what one is doing but rather having the mind full of attention, full of awareness of what is going on. If you are really mindful you are aware of the movement of the arm when you move it, and if you really are aware, you can catch the thought that precedes the movement of the arm. Many things have to happen in your *citta* and the five khandas before the arm or the finger move; it's not an automatic process. If the *citta* leaves the body, the body lies still, for the *citta* is the prime mover. The *citta* uses the body for its pleasure; that's why it's in there, and that's why it's stuck there. Normally, the *citta* cannot get out unless the body dies, and then it looks for the next body until that body dies when it looks for the next body, and so on. It never gives up, until we investigate using *paññā*.

The wisdom I'm talking about is not acquiring knowledge; we've all been to school or university, but what good has this knowledge been to us? We've learned about Buddhism, but what good has that been? If this kind of knowledge does not lead us onto our meditation cushions to sit in *samādhi*, or encourage us to do walking meditation (*jongrom*), then it is worthless. What we really need to get to grips with are those teachings of the Lord Buddha that lead us to experience for ourselves; this is what he promised – follow the path, follow the signs and you will experience the Dhamma within your own heart, apparent to everyone who practices – *ehi-passiko* (come and see and you will know for yourself). But it's not apparent to anyone who studies, for knowledge is not wisdom. Remember this well; wisdom is gained from insight – seeing into the true nature of things. Insight is the process of connecting with the heart so that the *kilesas* give way for a second, allowing you to see into the true nature of things.

So, the path of wisdom is the path of teaching the heart. We have to make it see and see and see again until it understands. We investigate and investigate and teach the heart over and over again. Have you understood the four elements? Have you understood the body? If not, we have to investigate, dissect, split the body apart, and observe with the heart until it understands. The heart is the only thing that can let go. Even if you are convinced that greed is not a good thing, you still have greed. Even if you are convinced in your mind that hate is not a good thing, you are still full of hate. Knowledge does not solve the problem; we have to experience the truth – the heart has to know what greed really is. Is it something that I really like, is it something that I cherish, or is it something loathsome? And we do this over and over again, perhaps even a billion times, until the heart understands and lets go, perhaps after the billion-and-first time. Then, there are no questions left; greed goes and hate goes at the same time. But we need to *teach* the heart, using wisdom to investigate the *kilesas* that are moving us or the things we are made of, i.e. the five khandas of body (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), memory and association (*saññā*), thoughts (*sankhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These are all that actually exists, everything else is made up. It's as though a good cook uses only five ingredients to create all the delicious dishes in the world. Everything is made up of the five khandas, and if we don't understand them we will be fooled by them, just as we are fooled by the range of different dishes unless we investigate their ingredients. So, let's taste each ingredient in its pure form. Let's taste *rūpa* as *rūpa*, *vedanā* as *vedanā*, *saññā* as *saññā*, *sankhāra* as *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa* as *viññāṇa* – to get the flavour of these

components that make up the whole universe, our universe, our world – which is the only thing that concerns us. This is the path of wisdom.

So, to go to back to *samādhi*, if we don't have the mindfulness and awareness to grab hold of the things that are happening – and there are 3,000 mind moments in the blink of the eye, so if we can't catch that - then it's just a train that rushes by and takes us wherever it is going. If we don't get our awareness or mindfulness up to the speed of the rushing train, we will never be able to see who is driving the engine and which passengers are in the compartments. It will just rush and rush and rush, and we'll drift along in its slip-stream from one birth to the next. So, we have to sharpen our mindfulness – this is called developing *sati*. Than Acharn Mahā Bua calls it the basis of practice; if we don't have *sati*, whatever we do is worthless. If we do something without *sati*, it has no value. Some people try to look mindful by doing things slowly, and Than Acharn Mahā Bua used to look at them and ask, "I wonder if they have any mindfulness?". Eating extremely slowly or brushing teeth extremely slowly, thinking how mindful you are, is not really being mindful but rather being self-conscious of how well or how slowly you are doing these things. That's not mindfulness; real mindfulness is catching the mind and body movements to see what is pulling what, what is pulling the trigger and what comes after. It's observing cause and effect.

So, make up your mind. Whatever it costs, get down into *samādhi*. *Upacāra samādhi* is not beyond your abilities, and neither is *appanā samādhi*. You just have to centre the mind and not let it go out under any circumstances. Imagine that you have to keep the riches of a king in a room; you are not allowed to let anyone in or out, and this is your only task. So, you have to stand in front of the door all the time; you cannot take a nap, you cannot go to the toilet. You just have to stand there, observe what is going on and preserve the riches of the king. And that's how you get into *samādhi*; put your attention on the word *buddho* or the breath and be interested in nothing else. Determination is the important factor – the effort doesn't consist of forcing the mind on the object, but rather, once you see that the mind wants to go out, in pulling the mind back where it belongs. That's all that we need to do; we don't have to use power or force, just a continual bringing back of the mind to the meditation object. This is where we put our effort, and the effort needs to be constant without waning. And we need determination, so that when we make up our minds to sit or walk for one, two or three hours, we practice for that length of time. Of course, like everyone else, you will find this to be hell – there's a lot of *dukkha* (suffering) in just keeping the mind still.

So, for the short time you are visiting this monastery, I want you to get into *samādhi*, to get relief from *dukkha* for the first time. Then, once you really know the path, and can attain calm every day, you can start doing the practice of investigation to get rid of the obstinate *kilesas* that rule your hearts. Greed, hate and delusion have their roots so deep in the heart that we have to undergo extreme pain to uproot them. We need mindfulness, power and a sharp knife to accomplish the task.

And now I ask to stop.