

ARIYA-PUGGALA

The liberated ones

Ariya-puggala: The Liberated Ones

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Preface

The *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* has over 500 sermons that have been recorded and are available for online streaming or download at kpyusa.org. This particular sermon was selected by *Phra Ānandapañño*. It was selected due to its comprehensive subject matter.

In this sermon, *Ācariya Thoon* covers what it means to be an *ariya-puggala*, in particular, an *arahant*. This is fantastic because he shares his insight and experiences with us. Insight that is respected and highly valued due to the fact that he was an *arahant* himself. *Ācariya Thoon* explains the process of an *arahant's* bones turning into relics. He also explains the criteria laypeople can use to determine whether someone is an *arahant*. He also shares with us his personal experiences with other world famous *arahants* such as *Ācariya Khao Anālayo* and *Ācariya Juan Kulajeṭṭho*. *Ācariya Thoon* also explains the proper practice of Buddhism and how to become an *ariya-puggala* by citing examples from both the Buddha's and our current eras.

This sermon has been translated from Thai into English in hopes that English readers may benefit from this sermon as much as Thai practitioners have. Ever since *Ācariya Thoon's* passing, there has been a steep rise in the demand for his media (books, sermons, mp3s, etc.). In especially by the non-Thai speaking community.

In this book, all Pali words are *italicized*. The first instance of each word is followed by its English translation. All effort was used to try to maintain the flow and character of *Ācariya Thoon's* original

sermon. Some words/phrases were omitted due to their lack of cultural parallels between Thai and English. The sermon was given in the first person. All I's refer to *Ācariya Thoon* and not the translator.

The Translator

San Francisco, USA

Ariya-puggala

Today is the day we enter the *vassa* (rains retreat). In many places all over Thailand, there are candle procession ceremonies on this day, Asalha Puja. There are four important dates in that are celebrated in Buddhism.

1. The day we enter the *vassa* (Asalha Puja)
2. The day we exit the *vassa*
3. Magha Puja
4. Visakha Puja

These are the important days of Buddhism that have been celebrated for a long time.

Each temple and place has their own set of teachers and instructors that teach *dhmma* and how to practice to increase their *pāramī* (perfections of character, virtue) and merit to the highest extent. In each life that we have been born and reborn into has been so tough. Each of us is not capable of realizing how tough our births have been. But it is clear to me, I can see it, I know. It is extremely difficult to be born and encounter Buddhism in each birth. In some cases, the Buddha has been born into the world, but we are born into a different country or place. The actual chance of encountering the Buddha is dreadfully small. We are exceptionally lucky.

In the past, Buddhism had its start in India. But now, Buddhism in India has greatly deteriorated. Presently, Buddhism is prominent in Thailand. Buddhism's history in Thailand is extremely

long. I have studied how Buddhism made its way to Thailand and can see that we are extremely lucky to have Buddhism.

Over the course of Buddhist history, we have had many teachers and lineages. The two most important teachers were *Luang Pu Sao* (Ācariya Sao Kantasīlo) and *Luang Pu Mun* (Ācariya Mun Bhūridatto). Many others had fruitful practices, but were not as prominent. When we reached the time of *Luang Pu Sao* and *Luang Pu Mun*, they were prominent. They were the evidence that *arahants* (fully enlightened persons) still existed in our world. How does one measure an *arahant*? In reality, those who are *arahants* will be self-aware, but for others it is nigh impossible to determine who is or is not an *arahant*. But the one way we can know for certain who is or is not an *arahant* is after their cremation. After the cremation, if the bones become relics, that person was an *arahant*. A real *arahant*. Sometimes it will occur with Mae Chee (8-precept nuns). Sometimes it will occur within some laypeople. They still exist in this era. I have been witness to it. I have seen it. *Arahants* do not only have to be monks. They can also be Mae Chee. They can be laypeople. Anyone who's bones turn to relics, they are surely an *arahant*.

The relics will be no different than those in the Buddha's era. Relics will only occur with *arahants*. As for the other *ariya-puggala* (enlightened holy people) – *anāgāmi* (non-returner), *sakadāgāmi* (once-returner), *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer), their bones will not turn into relics. They will be clear and bright, but will not transform into relics.

Many people believe that relics come from the power of aspiration. They think that for people such as *tāpasa* (people who

practice extreme austerity) and ascetics, as they practice their meditation, they can form an aspiration that will transform their bones into relics. This is not even remotely possible.

Do *arahants* still exist? Yes. There are still many in this era. As for *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmi* and *anāgāmi*'s, there are plenty. But of those who have penetrated the truth and have become enlightened, they will keep to themselves; they will not let anyone know. They will act as if they are dumb. They won't show that they have anything special. There is the saying, "If you have eyes, act as if you are blind. If you have ears, act as if you are deaf, if you have a mouth, act as if you are mute." This is why it is hard for us to tell who is an *ariya-puggala*. Those who are will not tell us.

For example, take *Ajahn Cum* from Bahn Seytee. Before, I didn't know what he was. He spoke in a very unrefined manner. He liked to joke and tease. There was an *Ajahn Jao Khun Sahn* who was very heedless with him. He often scolded and reprimanded him. But *Ajahn Cum* was unresponsive.

One day while I was on a *dhutaṅga* (forest journey) with him, as he was talking, he said something that made me wonder how he could have said that. It made me curious. After I considered many things, I came to the realization that he was someone who has become an *arahant* already. But why did he act this way? This is learning about *arahants*. They have different personalities. When he was about to pass away, he asked his students to wrap him in seven layers of white cloth. This was his last order before his death and cremation. Many monks were shocked at this because this was the speech of an *arahant*, not a regular person. Once they

cremated him, after a day or two, all his remains were relics. Everyone was surprised and shocked about *Ajahn Cum*.

Will all bones become relics the same? It takes different amounts of time. I personally took note of *Ajahn Cirapañño* (*Ācariya Kongma Cirapañño*) at Wat Dhammachedi. Then, it was during my third *vassa* at Wat Pa Nongsang with *Luang Pu Boowa* (*Ācariya Boowa Siripuṇṇo*). But I didn't get to go to his cremation ceremony, but *Luang Pu Boowa* did. He told me to stay and watch the temple. So I did. *Luang Pu Boowa* received some of the relics from the ceremony. He brought some of the relics back to his *kuṭi* (monk's hut). He showed me and said, "These are the relics of an *arahant*." He told me that last night, the relics were very aromatic. Many people had the relics of *Luang Pu Kongma*. They showed them off. It was very interesting. The remains that were used to show people would stay as regular bones. However, some were put into the small *cetiya* (stupa shaped receptacle). After a year, when they went to go open it, they were all relics. But the ones that were used to show off, they remained bones. Then they took those bones and put them in the *cetiya*. After a couple years, they opened it again and they were all relics.

Or take *Ajahn Wan* (*Ācariya Wan Uttamo*). *Ajahn Lor* (*Ācariya Lor Nāthakaro*) took *Ajahn Wan's* remains and showed them to people. The remains that were used to show people did not change to relics. However, the portion that he set aside in a *cetiya* all turned into relics. The relics were just like those from the Buddha's time.

Trying to figure out who is or is not a holy person is really hard to do. Most people just use a person's external personality as their

criteria. How do they speak or act? Are they refined? Are they serene? Those people use external behavior as a determinant of whether someone is a holy person or merely a normal person.

For example, *Ajahn Juan* (*Ācariya Juan Kulajeṭṭho*) of Puu Tok. Many people go to pay their respects to him. While he was alive, almost everyone did not believe he was an *arahant*. He didn't show off and he never talked about it. However, he gave really good teachings, really good *dhamma* talks. But if you ask me if I knew? I did.

The year that I spent the *vassa* at Gongpen Cave, I went to visit Ajahn Juan. Before I went, I contemplated upon whether he was an *arahant* or not because some people had suggested to me that he was an *arahant*. Namely, *Luang Pu Khao* (*Ācariya Khao Anālayo*) told me that, *Ajahn Juan* is clear minded, he is ready, he is free from any further suffering." I wondered if it was true. So I entered a meditative state to see. Back then I was relatively new (to being an *arahant*) and I was curious. So I went into deep meditation and reflected on *Ajahn Juan*. I had already reflected on *Ajahn Wan* and was no longer curious about him. However, I had not yet reflected on *Ajahn Juan*.

During my reflection, there was a palace in the middle of a lake. The palace was extremely beautiful, but it was completely surrounded by water. As I looked into the palace, I saw that *Ajahn Juan* was the only one in there. He was walking around and sometimes he sat. I walked all around and could not see any way of getting to the palace. There were no bridges or anything. So I yelled up to him, "*Ajahn, Ajahn*, where is the bridge? I want to go pay my respects to you!" *Ajahn Juan* answered by pointing to a

singular bamboo the size of an arm. It was just placed floating in the water. *Ajahn Juan* pointed to it and said, “That is the bridge.” He challenged me by saying, “If you think you are good enough, then come on over, but if you are not good enough, don’t bother.” I thought, “What is this?” So I asked him, “How did you get over?” He said he crossed the floating bamboo bridge. So, I thought, if he could do it, then so could I. So I stepped on the bamboo and crossed to the palace. When I got to the palace, we talked for a little bit, but my mind left the meditative state. I deduced that *Ajahn Juan* was probably an *arahant* as *Luang Pu Khao* had predicted.

So, after the *vassa*, I went on a *dhutaṅga* to visit *Ajahn Juan* at Puu Tok. At first I tried to ask him, but he wouldn’t talk about it. He was only willing to converse about general *dhamma*. I tried to interview him to ascertain the story as to how he became an *arahant*. It took a while, but I was able to get it out of him. He asked me, “How did you know I was an *arahant*?” I said, “Don’t worry about it, I know, that’s all.” Once he knew that I knew, he told me everything. After that, he told me, “Don’t tell anyone.” He said, “I have only told two people about my being an *arahant*, only *Luang Pu Khao* and you. Promise not to tell anyone.” I promised. And while he was alive, I never spoke of it. After he died in the plane crash, all his remains were cremated and they became relics. During his life, no one knew he was an *arahant*. Only two people in the whole world knew he was an *arahant* – *Luang Pu Khao* and me. This is an example of someone who had practiced to the end of suffering and he did not show off.

Is enlightenment in this time and the era of the Buddha identical? Yes. *Kilesa* (defilements) leave just the same. *Nibbāna* (final enlightenment) is just the same. *Nibbāna* is the end of all defilements. This is what *nibbāna* means. Speaking and acting are just external behaviors. Just like *Ajahn Cum*. That is why I teach that identifying a holy person is extremely hard. Many laypeople brag that they can tell who is an *arahant* and who is a holy person. They are merely bragging and embellishing.

There is a saying regarding the identification of a holy person,

Deep Water, Deep Shadow

Deep Water, Shallow Shadow

Shallow Water, Deep Shadow

Shallow Water, Shallow Shadow.

You can use this criteria to figure out whether or not someone is a holy person. Deep water refers to an extensive level of *dhamma* attainment. A deep shadow refers to good outward behavior and mannerisms. This is one type of holy person.

The second type is deep water, shallow shadow. This refers to someone who has already attained a high level of *dhamma*, but their outward behavior and mannerisms are not refined. They do whatever they want. Their speech is not refined either. They speak freely and say whatever they want. Their behavior does not reflect their inner attainment, like *Ajahn Juan*. He spoke freely and liked to play around. You couldn't tell he was an *arahant*.

Ajahn Wan was an example of deep water and deep shadow, just like in the comparison. *Ajahn Juan* was an example of deep water and shallow shadow. There is a difference between the two types.

What about shallow water with deep shadow? This person does not have any level of *dhmma* attainment, but the deep shadow means that they are refined and controlled in speech and action. There is nothing you can blame them for. This is shallow water with a deep shadow.

The fourth type is the shallow water with shallow shadow. This refers to someone without any level of *dhmma* attainment and in addition their outwards speech and behavior are coarse and unrefined. They say what they want to say and they do what they want to do. They are 100% a non-holy person. Their minds are void of *dhmma* attainment and their actions are reprimandable.

If we were to take monks of deep water and deep shadow and put them together with monks of shallow water and deep shadow, we would not be able to discern the real *arahant* from the fake *arahant*. Both have the same external behavior. Their behavior is controlled and refined. Even though one is a real *arahant* and one is a non-holy person, their behaviors are the same. On the outside, they seem exactly the same. This is one group.

As for the second group, if we were to take monks of deep water and shallow shadows and shallow waters and shallow shadows and put them together, we can notice that both have seemingly uncontrolled and unrefined external action and speech. We would not be able to tell who the real or fake *arahant* is since both of them have unrefined speech and behavior. The one with the

deep water and shallow shadow is the real one. But we won't know.

The determining of a holy person is very hard. You won't be able to do it. Definitely not through merely observing their speech and behavior. You won't be able to tell. This is just human behavior. It differs for different people.

Were there any examples of this in the Buddha's era? Yes. For example, *Phra Sāriputta*. Many monks of that time were very critical of him because he was seemingly unrefined in behavior and speech. He was someone who liked to have fun. Whenever he got to a small pond or puddle, he would just hop or jump over it. People who saw this would say that he was very unrefined and undeserving of being the Buddha's foremost disciple. Some of the monks didn't believe that he was even an *arahant* due to his unrefined behavior. So there was a problem. The Buddha had to call a meeting of the **Sangha** (collective of monks) and the Buddha had to personally vouch that *Phra Sāriputta* was an *arahant* in order for people to believe that he was an *arahant*. *Phra Sāriputta* was an example of deep water and shallow shadow. It is the same way in our era. People who are shallow water and deep shadow or deep water and shallow shadow are all mixed up.

In our practice, the most important thing is to find the right teacher. Our current era is close to the end of Buddhism. The current crop of teachers that teach these days do so according to what they understand. Whatever they have understood, whatever they have experienced, that is what they teach. That is why we have so many styles and lineages. The content taught is not very

similar. The only similar thing is that they mostly teach meditation. They desire tranquility and peacefulness.

One thing that is vastly different is the concept of *vipassanā* (contemplative meditation). Many groups will teach this differently. If we were to listen to the many teachers teach about *vipassanā* and if we were to pay attention we would be able to hear the many differences. I have paid attention and listened and found that they preach differently about *vipassanā* and perception. In general, they will use meditation as a basis. But in the Buddha's time, the Buddha taught us to use wisdom as a basis in practicing.

There are many different interpretations of Buddha's teachings. Why are they so different? The people who write the manuals in our time seem to be non-holy people, that is, people who are not enlightened. The difference starts with the belief that once our minds are tranquil and still, wisdom will spontaneously arise. This is vastly different. This is something I talk about a lot and often in this day and age. I am directly against this. There is no evidence anywhere to support this. There is no example of this in the Buddha's era. The Buddha never taught, "See here, laypeople and monks, you should meditate and make your minds still and wisdom will spontaneously occur." There is no evidence the Buddha ever taught this anywhere to anyone. But this is what people are teaching these days. Laypeople these days have not done enough research. We do not pay attention to what went on in the days of the Buddha. We speak from the present only. The manuals are wrong, but who is going to fix them? You can't. No one will.

When the Buddha was alive, he predicted that the people who will destroy his teachings, the *Dhamma*, are none other than Buddhists themselves. The Buddha will teach one thing, but they will interpret his teachings wrongly and then turn around and teach others incorrectly. Just like what I mentioned earlier. Why did they interpret his teachings as if you meditate and are able to make your mind still, wisdom will spontaneously occur? There was no such occurrence of this during the Buddha's time. Many people in the Buddha's time listened to the Buddha's *Dhamma* and practiced it or many even became enlightened right in the Buddha's presence. At times, tens to hundreds of thousands of people became enlightened right in the Buddha's presence. If you were to ask them if they knew of the five precepts (abstain from killing, stealing, adultery, false speech and intoxicants) or how to meditate, they would respond that they didn't. However, they have the five precepts within them after they became enlightened.

In one noted instance, the Buddha went to *Rājagaha* to preach to *King Bimbisāra*. *King Bimbisāra* invited the entire region to come listen to the Buddha. In total there were one hundred and twenty thousand people. Of those 120,000 people, did any of them know of the five precepts? Not a single person. Out of all of them, did any of them know how to meditate? No. In that day and age, there were no [Buddhist] manuals to read because there were no manuals. People came from all over and they didn't even know how to bow down to the Buddha. At most, they put their hands in the lotus position in greeting and reverence. How was the Buddha able to preach to these people and help most of them become enlightened even though they didn't know the five precepts or even how to meditate? How were they able to

become *ariya-puggala*? This should be considered and contemplated upon.

Whatever the Buddha talked about, they contemplated and discerned. They used the wisdom that they already had to follow along. *Dhamma* is ancient. That is, the Buddha took old issues and old concepts that these people already encountered in their lives and used them to teach them. The things that they already knew, the things that they were already doing were used to teach them. He used the things that they did right and did wrong to teach them. Acting like this is wrong. Acting like this is right. Speaking like this is wrong. Speaking like this is right. Having these viewpoints is wrong. Having these viewpoints is right. He started by teaching them about what they were doing right and wrong. Now they understood the truth by using their own logic and reasoning. At the end of his sermon, of the 120,000 people in attendance, 110,000 people became enlightened. Did any of these people previously practice the five precepts? No. The five precepts came after they became enlightened. The precepts came on their own.

As they were listening to the Buddha, did they have *samādhi* (concentration – commonly misunderstood as a synonym for meditation)? Yes. They had concentration. They were focused on what the Buddha was preaching. The focus from listening is the *samādhi* of focus. Once they used their own wisdom to discern what the Buddha taught, once again, they were focused on thinking. This thinking refers to *pañña* (wisdom and discernment). They reflected and were mindful of what the Buddha was teaching. This is *sati* (mindfulness). All three things go together.

samādhi, *sati*, and *paññā*. They had the right viewpoint at that point. Once they had reached the end of the sermon, they were able to become enlightened as *ariya-puggala*. If we study the history of *ariya-puggala*, of in particular *sotāpanna* (stream-enterers), it is not hard to see and is easy to understand. It is logical and reasonable.

There are two types of *samādhi* (concentration): *samādhi* of focus and *samādhi* of tranquility. Are they different? Yes. What type of people are able to practice the *samādhi* of tranquility? The people of the *cetovimutti* (deliverance of mind) characteristic. They can achieve the *samādhi* of tranquility. What types of people are not able to practice the *samādhi* of tranquility, but can achieve the *samādhi* of focus? These are the people of the *paññāvimutti* (deliverance through wisdom) characteristic. When they practice *samādhi*, they don't strive for tranquility, but they strive for focus so that they can think and contemplate according to reason and logic and discern the truth. They can become enlightened right away. Those who have a high *pāramī* (perfections of character) can become *arahants* right away. Are they able to practice *samādhi* of tranquility? Not at all. They are able to practice *samādhi* of focus.

When studying the history of *ariya-puggala* in the Buddha's era, we must study many different cases. There were very many cases of laypeople who became enlightened and obtained the level of *sotāpanna* in the Buddha's time. Another thing in the Buddha's time was that even laypeople could teach *dhamma* to other laypeople to become enlightened. For example, *Phra Sāriputta*. After he listened to *dhamma* from the Venerable Assaji and

became a *sotāpanna*, he went and explained this to his dear friend *Mahā Moggallāna*. He told him that “All *dhamma* starts from causes, and their extinction comes through the extinction of that cause.” After hearing this, Moggallāna became enlightened as a *sotāpanna*. It is not necessary that people have to listen to monks to become enlightened. Even laypeople can teach *dhamma* to each other and become enlightened.

There is another example in the Buddha scriptures. There is a story of *Khujjuttarā*, or sometimes known as the hunchback due to her inability to walk with her back straight. She was one of the main attendants to *Queen Sāmāvatī*. She was very intelligent and a quick-thinker. *Queen Sāmāvatī* ordered the hunchback to go buy flowers from the flower shop of *Sumana*. *Queen Sāmāvatī* gave her eight gold coins for flowers. Upon buying the flowers, *Sumana* gave her two bundles. She felt this was too heavy, so she only bought flowers with four of the gold coins and pocketed the rest. Corruption had taken place in her heart. The hunchback came to buy flowers every day. *Queen Sāmāvatī* gave her eight gold coins every day and she would pocket four of the gold coins every day. She did this for a long time.

Had the hunchback servant lady ever seen the Buddha? No. She had at most only seen him from a distance. She had never heard a sermon, and had never tried to go in closer. At most, she only saw his yellow robe as he went for alms from afar. One day, *Sumana* the shopkeeper invited the Buddha and 500 monks to take alms at his house. On that day, as per usual, the hunchback went to buy flowers. *Sumana* told the hunchback that, “I haven’t arranged the flowers for you yet today. I have invited the Buddha

to take alms at my house. After he has taken his meal, we will get to listen to a sermon from the Buddha. Do you mind waiting here? Let me listen to the Buddha's sermon first, and you can listen too. After we have listened to the Buddha's sermon, I will go gather the flowers for you."

The hunchback agreed. The shopkeeper then went and prepared a canopy of flowers for the Buddha. The flowers covered all sides of the shop, including the roof. There were many colors and flowers in the canopy. After the Buddha had finished his meal, he ascended onto the seat prepared for him and gave a talk.

In his talk, what did the Buddha use for an example? He used the flowers as an example, as a topic for his sermon so that everyone could *opanayiko* (internalize, reflecting inwardly). They reflected that, just as the flowers in the canopy, when they first start to bud, they are not that beautiful, but after they have bloomed and blossomed, the flowers will be beautiful. Even with the many colors, the flowers will be beautiful like the flowers we see on the canopy. The many flowers with the many colors can be combined and made into a bouquet. The flowers will have much value, benefit and beauty. This is the manner by which the Buddha gave his sermon.

The hunchback followed along in thought. She followed along and internalized the parallel and *opanayiko*. The flowers are just like our bodies. Our body is made up of the elements of earth, water, wind and fire. Our body, which is made up of the four elements, was once young and later grew up into young men and women. We all have beauty. At this age, it is just like the fully bloomed and blossomed flower. But once the flower has fully

bloomed, after a few days, the flowers will wilt and wither. Just like our bodies. Once we get older, the beauty deteriorates and eventually leaves us.

The hunchback internalized that the flowers were just like her own body. The hunchback saw that it was true and followed along in thought with what the Buddha was saying. As she listened, she continuously considered the flowers in the sermon as a replacement for her own body. The Buddha continued by saying that after the flowers have aged, they will wilt and wither and eventually become earth. The four elements of the flowers will merge with the four elements of nature and the flowers will have returned to the nature from whence they came. Our bodies are the same way. Once we reach the end of our lives, or when we die, the four elements in our bodies will dissipate and return to nature – back to the elements of earth, water, wind and fire. She listened to *dhmma* and knew how to internalize.

When the Buddha had finished his sermon, the hunchback became enlightened and obtained stream-entry as a *sotāpanna*. If we asked the hunchback, did she know the five precepts? No. Did she know what *samādhī* or meditation is? No? How could she? She had no training. She listened to *Dhamma* and contemplated based on absolute truths so that she could see and experience according to that absolute truth, and became an *ariya-puggala*. That easy, just like that.

Once a human being becomes an *ariya-puggala*, the five precepts arise within them. Various *dhmma* is seen and understood from within. *Hiri*, the fear and discernment of birth has arisen. She reflected that before, she used to cheat her mistress, *Sāmāvatī*,

every day out of four gold coins. Shame grew within her. However, the hunchback had penetrated the *dhamma*, become a *sotāpanna*, had *paṭibhāṇa-paṭisambhidā* (knowledge and wisdom of the right way of acting) and became fluent in the *dhamma*. She could speak the *dhamma* clearly and proficiently.

Look, this was someone who had previously not known any *dhamma*, did not know of the 5 precepts, who did not know *samādhi* or meditation. But after she penetrated the view of *dhamma* and became a *sotāpanna*, she was masterful and proficient in the *dhamma*. She now instantly had the ability to masterfully and proficiently penetrate truths.

Since the hunchback had come to buy flowers, the shop owner prepared her usual one bunch of flowers. The hunchback said, “No. I want two bunches.” Why two bunches? She brought 8 coins, so could buy 2 bunches. She carried them on both shoulders. She knew fear and shame of wrongdoing in her heart and was scared to be corrupt any further. It was later in the day that she arrived home. She figured that when she got to the house, *Sāmāvatī* would most likely reprimand her, “Where were you? What were you doing?” She was afraid *Sāmāvatī* would create negative karma. So, as she entered the house, she yelled, “Mistress, please don’t yell or punish me, I have brought a gift for you!” *Sāmāvatī* was confused, why did the hunchback speak this way? She never spoke like this before. Even though she was late, she had never spoken like this before. How dare she say, don’t yell or punish me? So when she saw the hunchback, she asked, “Why are you so late today? What were you doing?”

The hunchback told her the truth. She said, “Please listen first, my venerable queen. The shopkeeper *Sumana*, did a great merit today and invited the Buddha and 500 monks to partake of a meal at his house. *Sumana* the shopkeeper said he didn’t have time to find flowers for me and after he was finished seeing to the Buddha, he would find and arrange the flowers. So I had the opportunity to listen to a sermon from the Buddha.”

“Really? Can you remember what the Buddha said?”

“Yes I can mistress.”

“Please tell me then.” *Sāmāvatī* begged and pleaded with her own maidservant to tell her. “Do you remember? Tell me, tell me.”

The hunchback then said, “The expounding of *dhamma* to someone, to anyone for that matter, is sacred and cannot be spoken lightly. If you want me to tell you, you have to prepare a high seat of honor for me. You have to take the flowers that we have here and adorn the seat. *Sāmāvatī* readily agreed and had the other maidservants prepare a seat of honor and adorned it with flowers. So after the hunchback sat on the seat of honor, she began to teach the *dhamma*. She expounded the *dhamma* to the queen.

Take note of this, this is the maidservant, the slave. Who was *Sāmāvatī*? She was the Queen. She was the wife of King *Udayana*. And in addition there were another 500 maidservants who were sitting and listening. The hunchback got on to the seat of honor and began. She did not begin with precepts. Instead she said, “Listen attentively as I explain the *dhamma* to you, as you listen, use your *paññā* and follow along.” She told this to all her fellow

maidservants and the queen, “Use your *paññā* to think along.” Then she began to speak the *dhamma*. She used the flowers, the very flowers on the seat of honor as her topic. She did this so that everyone could see and ponder the truth. How were the flowers beautiful? She explained it the same way she heard it from the Buddha. “Flowers come from dirty things, from roots that need dirt and water to feed the stems. Out of the stems are flowers. After not too long, the flowers bud for a short while, they are beautiful for a short while, and then they wither. Contemplate our bodies as the flowers. The flowers will have to wither and die. All of our bodies will eventually wither like the flower. Once the flower withers, dies and becomes part of the earth, just like our bodies after we die, our bodies will return to the earth and break down into the Four Main Elements (earth, wind, water and fire) according to their nature.”

The five hundred maidservants and one Queen, listening to a maidservant, at the moment she finished, all five hundred maidservants and one *Sāmāvatī*, became *ariya-puggala*, they became *sotāpanna*. Take note of this, even with laypeople teaching the *dhamma* to other laypeople, they were able to become *ariya-puggala*.

One point here is that these people, who became *ariya-puggala*, had already practiced *pāramī* in regards to *aniccam*. They have already contemplated *aniccam* of the body in previous lives. They used flowers as a metaphor and example for their contemplation. In reality, the hunchback alone did not have direct knowledge of what it would take to make her fellow maidservants enlightened, but it just so happened that she taught that which was congruent

to what *pāramī* they have all previously contemplated. In the end, they all became *ariya-puggala*. In the Buddha's time, it wasn't hard at all.

I [*Luang Por Thoon*] have read almost every story of *ariya-puggala*. In general, when the Buddha explains *Dhamma*, the Buddha will talk about the external before internal. Are the flowers external? Yes, they are external. So, he gives a sermon about the impermanence of the external for people to understand and then *opanayiko*. That is, internalize and compare to our own bodies. Almost every story was like this.

The external is for looking for evidence. Everything, whether it occurs naturally or was man-made, how does it change? Take all of this and examine how it changes. And then *opanayiko*. Internalize and compare it to our bodies in every part. See how we have universal commonalities. Our bodies change just the same. Take note and notice both the external and internal. Take the external first and secondly, internalize it. This is how it was in the Buddha's time.

But in our time and era, we only teach the internal. We only take the *nāma* (formless). We only talk about the mind and soul. It is not conducive for practice. We talk about meditating and chanting the mantra, "Inhale – Arise, Exhale – Extinguish" It does not work like that. We must use the external as a tool for contemplation. Even with contemplating filthiness or impureness we must use the external as a tool for our contemplation. We must compare ourselves to the external to discover our qualities.

In the Buddha's time, when listening to his *Dhamma*, it was always

the external before the internal. Take the *paññā* that we already have and contemplate the external with *tilakkhaṇa* (three common characteristics – *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā*). Then internalize and compare it to our bodies and contemplate upon the four elements that make up our bodies with *tilakkhaṇa* as the foundation. This is not the *nāma* because the *nāma* is refined and abstract. Only those who have *paññā* that is extremely proficient and competent can contemplate the *nāma*. This *nāma*, if they have the capability to contemplate upon it, will lead to them becoming *arahants*, not *sotāpanna*. Contemplating this refined concept of *nāma*, crosses over the step of *sotāpanna*. The level of *sotāpanna* only needs you to take the external as a comparison for your bodies. All physical belongings, how do they come to be? From *sammuti* (volitional formations, imagination). We imagine them into being and thus they exist.

Previously, Thailand did not have a system of money as they do now. It didn't exist. Back then, they took oyster shells and imagined them as currency. And thus it had value according to our *sammuti*.

Therefore, when using *paññā* to contemplate, we must also utilize *sammuti*. We *sammuti* the issues and *opanayiko* the topic and compare it to our bodies so that we see we are exactly the same; we have universal commonalities; we are impermanent.

This is how we develop our *paññā*. The *dhmma* or truth is inherent to our bodies. This is one part. The other *dhmma* is external, whether it is dried leaves or flowers or other things that exist within this world, we can contemplate them immediately. We do not have to find tranquility or chant mantras first. We can

immediately contemplate upon *tilakkhaṇa*. Once you have contemplated this, *opanayiko* and internalize it and compare it to our bodies immediately every time. This is how to contemplate the universal commonalities - that we are impermanent.

If we contemplate inanimate objects we will, know that they don't have *dukkham* (suffering). They are only subject to *aniccam* (impermanence) and *anattā* (not-self). Whether we contemplate leaves or mangoes, we can contemplate upon the *aniccam* and *anattā*. If we were to contemplate upon all three, *dukkham*, *aniccam* and *anattā*, we would now be dealing with animate objects.

The concept of *dukkham*, must rely on humans or animals with life. It is the mind that feels suffering. This is the proper way of cultivating our *paññā*. Inanimate objects will be contemplated with *aniccam* and *anattā*.

People cling and attach to inanimate belongings, and take them from simple inanimate objects to becoming personal belongings. This is one cause of suffering. If we have money, we can experience suffering due to it. Even though money does not have a consciousness, those who do can experience suffering because of money, suffering because of belongings. This is called *upādāna* or clinging and attachment. Whatever we cling or attach to, it is with that that we will experience suffering. This is learning about ourselves. Learn how to teach ourselves. Teach ourselves often. Remind ourselves often. Don't be afraid our *paññā* will be used up.

The more we think and contemplate, the more proficient it will become. Don't be afraid that we will become over-thinkers or

whimsical imaginatives. How can we eliminate our imaginative side? We practice and train our thoughts according to the truth. This way, our thinking will be completely *paññā*, not whimsical imagination. We won't be imaginative any more if we contemplate according to the formula, according to *dukkhaṃ*, *aniccaṃ* and *anattā*.

In each case, we internalize them and compare them to our bodies. For instance, if we see animals experiencing suffering, we can internalize and compare that to our own bodies and minds. Each animal has a mind that experiences suffering just like us. Whether it is dogs, pigs or chickens, they have minds that experience suffering - just like us. We can internalize or *opanayiko* every time. The suffering in animals comes from their minds just like ours. All suffering exists in the mind. As for money and belongings, we must be attached and cling to them first before suffering can exist.

It is our job to gather and find belongs. But to what end? To help us survive, to help us live and eat. We need to use the external to take care of the internal. Food is external, whereas the body is internal. We take the external to support the internal so that it can continue to exist.

All food, once it has been consumed, cannot be maintained in its current form without decaying or changing. It is impossible. We have to eat, we have to gather and find them. Don't allow these belongings to make our hearts heavy. Don't cling to them. Whether we have a lot of money, or a little money, it is still just money.

Belongings are belongings. We must be able to differentiate them in our minds. They comprise the four basic needs (food, clothes, shelter and medicine) that we use on a daily basis. All belongings cannot prevent our aging, cannot prevent our death. Even if we were to eat fancy and expensive food, were it to cost \$100,000, we would not get younger. We will still age and still die. This is how to contemplate external belongings.

We only rely on them to live. We should not become attached to them. We should teach ourselves that if we become attached to a belonging, we will be reborn subject to that belonging. Whether this life, or a past life, if we are reborn in the future, if we are attached to a particular belonging, our mind will search for it and become reborn with it. We practice so that we don't have to be reborn. We must practice training our minds to not be attached to any belongings at all.

As long as we have life, as long as we are alive, as long as our body is whole, if it gets sick, we must give it medicine and take care of it. Just like a person who is in a boat trying to cross the ocean, once he finds a leak in the boat, he must find a way to prevent massive amounts of water from entering the boat. He must simultaneously keep paddling and fixing the leak until he reaches the other shore. He must try to take care of the boat and maintain it so that it can make it to the other side. He must keep paddling until it reaches the shore. Just so, each part of our body is just like the boat. Once it is ill we should take care of it according to our means and ability. But if we cannot cure it, we must let go. Letting go comes from not clinging to the concept that all illnesses can be healed. We must let go. We must be brave. Life and death

come as a pair. Whether we die fast or die slow is a separate issue. We must prepare ourselves in advance. This is how one must practice acceptance of death. We must do it often. Death merely means that our soul leaves our body. That's it. We must contemplate it often.

For example, there was a young girl who was born in the era of the *Buddha Kassapa*. In that era, she contemplated death quite often. All things must die. It just depends on the time. Whether they are small or large animals, she contemplated on the topic of their death. All things that come into existence must die. All objects, leaves and trees, even inanimate objects, whether they occur naturally or are manmade must also die. She contemplated until she felt melancholy and full of sorrow. She contemplated until she saw the truth the way it truly exists, that is all must die. She contemplated until it became second nature.

At that point that she was contemplating death, was she an *ariya-puggala*? No she wasn't. All the methods of thinking were of her own creation. After many more lives and deaths and rebirths, she was reborn in the era of our Buddha as the daughter of a weaver.

One day, her mother was weaving on one side of the temple grounds, while the young girl was winding thread on the other side. She was winding the thread to give to her mother. That day was an important day. Many Buddhists were gathering to hear a sermon from the Buddha. The Buddha had already ascended onto the prepared seat. Normally, once the Buddha ascends to the prepared seat, he would immediately give a sermon. However, on this day, he did not start a sermon. Once he got the prepared seat, he merely sat silently. There were hundreds and thousands

of people waiting, but he sat silent. People were confused as to why the Buddha was silent. Every other time that the Buddha ascended onto the prepared seat he would give a sermon. Many people were curious, but no one dared ask him.

The Buddha knew that the young girl had not finished winding the thread. He also knew that once she was done, she would carry her basket of thread and pass by here. She would sit and listen to the sermon here. She would become enlightened here. Since she had not arrived yet, the Buddha simply waited for her. Once the young girl was finished winding the thread, she set off. As she passed, she saw that hundreds and thousands of people were sitting silently. She wondered what all these silent people were doing. So she went to find out. She sat down in their midst. She didn't sit because she wanted to listen to *dhamma*, but rather because she wanted to see what everyone was doing.

Once she sat down, the Buddha started his sermon. He said, "See here. Everyone sitting here. All of us. Our lives are just like a roll of thread."

At that, the young girl was startled. It was directly applicable to what she had been contemplating in the past. Everyone's life is like a roll of thread. As we take the thread to be woven, as it is being woven, the thread slowly runs out. Our lives are the same. As we live, each moment, our life slowly runs out and we die. The young girl seized the opportunity to follow along. She used the thread as a metaphor and *opanayiko*. She internalized the concept into her mind that the finality of life was just as was being spoken. She compared it to her own life, to others lives, to animals lives and to all lives. She fully understood this.

She had previously contemplated death in many past lives. In this life, the Buddha saw the *pāramī* that she had cultivated in past lives and the Buddha topped off her past contemplations of death. At the end, the young girl became enlightened as a *sotāpanna* while she was listening to the sermon.

The Buddha gave his sermon deliberately, intentionally and specifically. However a person had previously contemplated in the past, the Buddha would top them off with the specific topic to help them. Due to this reason, many people in the Buddha's era were able to become enlightened. This is different than *arahants* teaching. Of all of the *arahants*, none of them have this special ability. As they give their sermon, it is merely a guess that might just happen to be right - just like when the hunchback gave the sermon to the queen. She guessed correctly and the result was 500 people became enlightened.

When we contemplate, we have to use our *paññā* to compare. Compare the external to our internal according to *tilakkhaṇa*, according to *aniccam*, according to *anattā*. If the object happens to have life, also contemplate according to *dukkham*.

Why do we suffer? Because there is a cause – which is *taṇhā* (desire). There is *kāma-taṇhā* (desire of sense pleasures), *bhava-taṇhā* (desire to become) and *vibhava-taṇhā* (desire to get rid of). This is how to contemplate and compare things that have life. We all have the ability to contemplate. Let's consider the example of *Luang Pu Khao*. What did he use as his topic of contemplation? A single grain of rice. We are talking of *Luang Pu Khao* from Gongpen Cave. I talked to *Luang Pu Khao* quite often. We spoke from sundown to sunrise practically every day. Once it became

dark, I would go talk with *Luang Pu Khao*. We would ask each other about everything. Sometimes I would ask him, sometimes he would ask me. We talked to each other about our past and how we got here. We talked for three days and three nights at times without sleeping. We just kept talking about *dhamma*. There was no end in sight. *Ajahn Peng* criticized me for talking to *Luang Pu* too much. Every night till morning was too much. *Luang Pu* is old, he is tired. But in fact, *Luang Pu* wasn't tired. When it came to talking about *dhamma*, he liked it. He could talk about anything *dhamma*-related. He could rest during the day. The night was for discussing the *dhamma*.

In regards to the *dhamma*, *Luang Pu* and I talked about many things. We talked about how we got here, how we cultivated our *pāramī* in order to get here. He would tell me about his past and then would ask me about my past.

He once told me a story about himself. The story was about *Luang Pu Khao* in the era of the *Buddha Sikhī*. This is actually a really big story of how we cultivated *pāramī* together.

In that era, *Luang Pu Khao* was a rice merchant. He would buy and sell rice. Once he made it to this era, he used a grain of rice as his topic of contemplation. Whatever behavior and past that we have, we should contemplate upon that. He used to be a rice merchant, so he used rice as his topic. One day he told me that as he was bathing and gather water for his *kuṭi* as he did every day, he sat down and watched the rice farmers as they were harvesting rice. He started thinking about the rice. Where does rice come from?

It comes from rice seeds. Each rice seed has its own genetics and fertility. If each rice seed is fertile, once planted, it will grow into a rice plant. One rice seed can grow to become many rice seeds as long as people take care of it. As it gets ripe for harvest, it can be used to feed people. If you take that rice, and plant it, it will continue to grow. He internalized this. He was very proficient in contemplation. He internalized the rice seed into his mind. He internalized and compared it to his mind, to his body. The rice seed is just like our mind that has defilements. Because of these defilements, we will have to be endlessly reborn. He contemplated all this from one rice seed.

As he was contemplating, his discernment grew and his wisdom grew. As he was contemplating, did he have *samādhī*? Yes, he had concentration. It helped him to be focused in his contemplation.

Did he have *sati*? Yes, he was mindful of what he was thinking about – the rice seed.

As he was contemplating this, knowledge arose. He had been ordained for over 20 years, but this was the first time knowledge had arisen for him. Once the wisdom had arisen in him, he quickly finished his bath, cleaned himself and did not return to his *kuṭi*. Instead, he walked in contemplation. All night, he used the rice seed as a metaphor for his contemplation. He expanded his contemplation from the rice seed.

He contemplated on the results and factors involved. He contemplated on other seeds, whether they were mangoes or longans; he contemplated on all of them. Just like the rice seed. He compared all of them to his own mind. As long as he still had

defilements in his mind, he would have to be reborn. Once born, he would encounter suffering. He contemplated this for a while and became tired. As he was tired, he sat down to rest. It was no later than midnight, but he didn't know for sure since they didn't have watches. As he sat down, he kept thinking about the rice seed.

Once his mind was calm, he continued contemplating, he kept refining his contemplation. At that point, he became enlightened as an *arahant*. *Āsavakkhayañāṇa* (the knowledge of the end of defilements) arose within him. He became an *arahant* that night. This is the story of *Luang Pu Khao* who used a single rice seed as his topic because his past involved rice seeds.

Of all of us sitting here, we don't know what our pasts involved. No one knows and no one can tell us. We must find out for ourselves. We do this by comparing external things to us internally. One day we will find the right topic that coincides with our past to contemplate on. No one has to tell us if it is right or wrong. It will be *paccattam*, that is, we will know on our own.

It doesn't matter if we are sitting or walking and contemplating. Don't be worried that our minds will wander aimlessly. It is our wisdom that is growing. If we do not think, our *paññā* cannot grow. Our *paññā* can only grow if we think, but we must think according to the truth, we must think according to *tilakkhaṇa*. We must contemplate and think often. Our *paññā* will become more proficient and fluent. This is the training of *paññā* - thinking according to the truth, so that we have *sammā-diṭṭhi* or right view. Once we know and experience the truth according to how it actually exists, we will have views according to *sammā-diṭṭhi*.

Once our foundation is firm in *sammā-ditṭhi*, it will expand in a circle. Our wisdom will grow more and more proficient.

So for us, whether we are monks or laypeople, we must focus on our practice in whatever way we see fit. We must rely on ourselves. We cannot only rely on waiting for *Luang Por Thoon* to give daily sermons. I have the personality of not liking to give sermons, but liking to contemplate and practice. Even before, I did not like to listen to sermons. Listening too much makes us stupid. It does not allow our *paññā* to grow. I don't like it. It makes us stupid. It prevents us from thinking. From the entire sermon I listen to, I would extract one or two main points and go expand and contemplate on my own. This is what I mean by growing and developing our *paññā*. We must not take knowledge from others, but take the knowledge that we gain and develop on our own.

I have given you enough to begin your practice. The *dhamma* given here today is sufficient. Thus, it has been stated.



Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño

(May 20, 1935 – Nov 11, 2008)

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño (Phra Banyapisantaera) was born in 1935, and ordained as a monk in 1961. In his early years, *Ācariya Thoon* set out to various forest destinations and practiced *dhamma* until he profoundly realized and understood according to the truth that Buddha had laid forth.

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño dedicated his life to the proliferation of Buddha's original teachings. Having achieved ultimate emancipation as an *arahant* in 1969, *Ācariya Thoon* spent the remainder of his life teaching the *dhamma* to practitioners both in Thailand and abroad.

Ācariya Thoon's style of *dhamma* practice is distinctive in that he emphasized the ability for laypeople to effectively practice in everyday settings. He stressed the importance of developing a comprehensive understanding of the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils associated with each issue.

Wat Pa ban Koh at Udon Thani (in the northeastern region of Thailand), the temple *Ācariya Thoon* founded in 1975, serves as a Buddhist landmark for generations of Buddhists to honor and venerate the Buddha's teachings and His relics housed in the great pagoda.

About the Translator

Phra Ānandapañño (Arnold Thian-Ngern) was born in San Francisco, CA, in the United States of America. He graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a degree in Electrical Engineering. Later on he went to pursue a Masters Degree from San Francisco State University while also running the family business. He was ordained May 20, 2009. Since that day, he has dedicated his life to learning and spreading the teachings of the Lord Buddha in the style of Ācariya *Thoon Khippapañño*. *Phra Ānandapañño* has been directly trained since 1999 by Ācariya *Thoon* and one of his foremost students - Mae Chee Yo (who also happens to be *Phra Ānandapañño's* mother).

Phra Ānandapañño is most well-known for his ability to give riveting sermons and teachings fluently in both English and Thai. *Phra Ānandapañño* and his sister Neecha Thian-Ngern have been personally ordered by Ācariya *Thoon* to translate and disseminate his teachings to reach the most people possible.

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