

LUCID HEART

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Natural Disasters

LUCID HEART

Everything is Illuminated

By

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño

Translated by

Neecha Thian-Ngern

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Editor's Preface

Throughout his nearly fifty years as a monk, *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* gave more than five hundred sermons. Out of those, we have hand selected sixteen sermons, to be transcribed and printed as books, in hopes that they may be of the utmost benefit.

The reader may notice that the subject matter and tone of each book in this series differs. This is because *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* adapted his teachings to fit the situation and audience. A sermon given at a funeral, a celebration, for a group of monks and novices, a group of professionals, or those who desire enlightenment are each unique in and of themselves.

This ten book collection entitled, "The Heart Series," is comprised of sermons given to monks and novices during rains retreats between the years 1994 and 2000. Some may be slightly puzzled by the uncommon name given to this dhamma

series. We invite those readers to take a look inside and discover the meaningful connection. We believe these books may provide a benefit not only to those in saffron or white robes, but also to those who desire simple happiness as well as those who seek enlightenment. The doubts that we encounter during each of our journeys can be dispelled with the wisdom contained in this series.

Though *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippanyo* is no longer with us, he has bequeathed unto us countless tricks and techniques that can be applied in our *dhamma* practice. As such, his disciples and followers have been able to continue and advance their practice, even in his absence.

I would like to thank those involved with this series:

Organization: Phra Nut Taesombut, PhD

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May all those involved, whether expressly named here or not, achieve their aspirations as they contribute to the auspicious merit of realizing *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño's* intention of providing the Buddha's *dhamma* to the world's citizens. May you achieve that which you desire, may your *dhamma* progress accordingly, may you be self-reliant, may the path to enlightenment be illuminated for you, and may you achieve final enlightenment in this lifetime.

Mae Chee Yo
Chief Editor

Translator's Preface

Some believe *dhamma* teachings are complex enough. Not only must a translator understand the language, but also the *dhamma* concepts presented in the teaching.

The Thai language style can prove quite tricky to translate. At times, there are two meanings for a single Thai word, posed in a context that isn't readily translated over to English. Other times, English pronouns must take a firm stand in a sentence in which *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* never specified the person or object.

Not only is the language a challenge, but the subject matter itself can also prove difficult. With many of the *dhamma* concepts presented here, I had to stop and consider which of the various meanings *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* intended. For that, I am grateful to have had Mae Yo as my mentor and editor.

To have been a pupil of *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* since the age of 16, and to be tasked

with translating his works for the English-speaking public is a honor and responsibility I take very seriously.

For those seeking answers, rest assured that the Buddha has provided us with a path that will lead us there. And our great teacher, the enlightened *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño*, has illuminated that path for us during a time in which many of us have lost our way. May the ten books in this series be the shoes you will need as you journey towards your goal.

I would also like to express my gratitude to those who contributed their ideas and helped to edit these sermons.

Neecha Thian-Ngern

Introduction

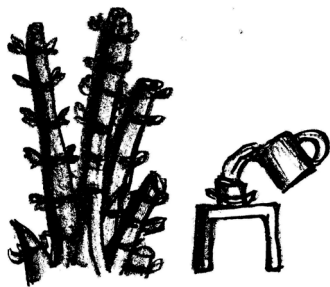
Enveloped by darkness, we cannot make out the lines etched onto our own hands. With a sliver of light, we can begin to see our present surroundings. With everything illuminated, you can see your reflection in the mirror, other people, and straight through to your past and future.

A lucid heart knows itself, knows others, and knows the world. It sees the patterns, similarities, and differences. It sees the path to freedom.

You are the only one who can switch on the light of wisdom. Isn't it time to lose the darkness?

October 11, 1996
Wat Pa Ban Koh
Udon Thani, Thailand

Everything is Illuminated



One for All

If we practice economical behavior, our lives will be much easier. We will not expend time being concerned about the things we use on a day to day basis. Towels and bed sheets, for example, can be used in an economical and waste-conscious manner. Along with being economical, we must take care to prevent the premature tearing and destruction of these items. Whenever we act in a wasteful manner, we will immediately feel ashamed of our rash behavior.

Since contemplating Luang Bu Khao's *dhamma* lesson on a single towel, I have stopped being wasteful and instead have tried to conserve every resource that I use. This translates to my monk robes, as well. There is nothing wrong with using my old set of monk robes or the same old seat cloth— they have endured years of use. Whether

there are plenty or few resources available, one who conserves has nothing to worry about.

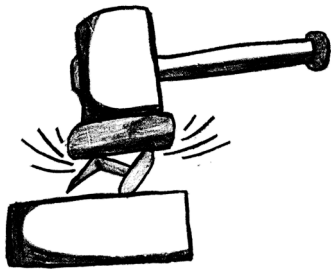
Train your mind to resist the pull of having all the newest and most innovative gadgets. Some people sport the latest car model, and then two or three months later they go in and buy a different model. Each of their cars is used for less than a year.

Just as a single towel can be used in a number of ways, a single bamboo stalk can also be whittled into a cup for drinking. Through attentive care, the bamboo cup can last for years. Could you use only one cup for everything? That single cup can be used for drinking, washing your face, washing yourself in the bathroom, and cleaning the toilet.

Life is much easier if you can be economical. But without practice, it is difficult to do. People feel repulsed by it, but there is nothing disgusting about using the same cup for a variety of purposes. The same goes for a washcloth, which can be used to wash your face, hands, or bottom.

Personally, I feel embarrassed that I have so many pairs of sandals. So many people have given me sandals that are expensive, top grade, and made of the best leather. When the leather sandals get soaked from being worn in the rain, I feel bad, but these people encourage it. They say that it would be even better if the sandals tear, because then they can buy me a new pair. Although I have countless pairs of sandals, I can't even share them with my colleagues because the size is so large. I have to keep an eye out for other monks with big feet.

Monk robes only consist of three parts – the upper cloth, the lower cloth, and the outer robe. But I have many outer robes. There are times when the layperson who offers it to me asks me to try it on, and I will do so, just to appease them. Sometimes, I will keep it, other times I will give the robes to my colleagues. But the robes are too large. So, again it is difficult to find a monk who is also tall in stature and can make use of them. It is not easy to be economical when I have four outer robes in my hut.



Pride

If you are someone who knows how to conserve and not be wasteful, you will have no difficulty adapting to any situation. Out in the forest, you can bunch together branches and twigs, tie them together, and make use of leaves in order to build a hut.

It is a waste the way people use nails and wood for construction these days. You can extract those nails, hammer them straight, soak them in oil, and then reuse them just as they were new. But people don't think of that.

There is a difference in the way it feels to use something that is old. For example, walking around the temple grounds, there are many discarded things that can still be used. Metal bowls, for example. After hammering them back into their original shape and thoroughly scrubbing them

clean, they can be useful again. From the day the temple opened up until this day, I have used the same bowl. It was originally a water bowl, and then it was used for painting and thrown into the forest. I took the disfigured bowl and hammered it back into shape. It has worked just fine; it has never even leaked.

There is a sense of pride inherent in creating something with our own two hands. When we sew something ourselves, even if it isn't beautiful, we are still proud of it. We will finish eating any dish we cook ourselves, despite its substandard taste. This is human nature.

It is best to create with our own two hands in that the care and attention we pour into our own projects is special. That is all in an external sense. Internally, when we cultivate our own thoughts and perceptions, make our own decisions, and shape our own personality, we can be especially proud of ourselves as well.

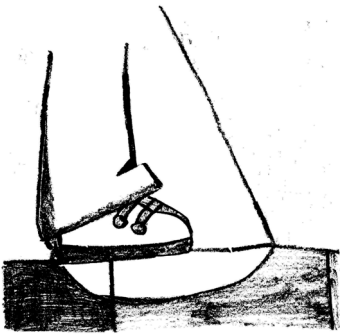
Try to copy others less and create your own more. You should be building your own wisdom

for the most part. Following others' examples is a small component, and is really just used for inspiration. From there you can expand on the model and develop your own thoughts. Use your own techniques to build your own ideas. Break off and do your own thing, while staying in line with the guidelines.

For instance, two different plates of food both can fill you up. Clothes fashioned in different ways can still achieve the same purpose. In the fashion world, people use unique designs to compete. People who merely copy the designs of others before them are considered dumb. Those who are creative and intelligent are inspired by others' designs and develop the rest on their own.

Dhamma practice is the same way. The Buddha laid the foundation for the path to enlightenment (arahant), as well as the intermediate levels on the path: *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmī*, *anāgāmī*. It is important to study the histories of the holy individuals who have gone before us. From those accounts, we must extract those models that are relevant to our personality type. We need

not follow the footsteps of those who were of a different personality type than us, because to do so would cause friction and confusion in our practice.



Flashlight

Most people believe there is a set formula for attaining enlightenment. Although the requirements are the same for all arahants, the way in which they attain enlightenment is different. Those who attain deliverance through wisdom (*paññāvimutti*) do not experience meditative absorptions, higher meditative attainments, or psychic powers because they are not skilled in these arenas. They are proficient in wisdom-related aspects.

Here is where we have to do some self-evaluation. If you encounter difficulty being still and entering serene meditative states, then you probably take after the wisdom type. Figure out which holy individuals were of the wisdom type, and follow their lead. Don't waste your efforts attempting to conform if you are not the deliverance through concentration personality type (*cetovimutti*).

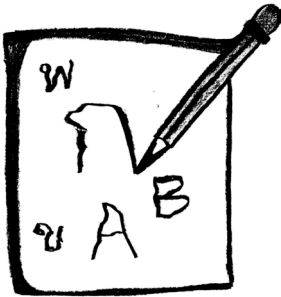
You've cultivated your personality for countless lifetimes; it is ineffective to start over from scratch. For instance, a well-trained soldier would have to be retrained in order to become an elementary school teacher. Similarly, a school teacher who wants to become a salesperson must also be retrained.

But if someone wants to stick to the same profession, there is no need for extra training. It is much easier. We have already cultivated wisdom-based attributes, so there is no need to scramble after the concentration-based personality types; the end of the path is the same for both. In fact, the path for the wisdom type is more direct and much faster, bypassing all those various meditative rest stops.

As a practitioner, you must know yourself well. If you are ignorant of your own personality, you will be unable to acquire the appropriate resources to retrain yourself. Regardless of personality type, however, everyone possesses greed, lust, anger, and delusion. In properly recognizing your qualities and the depth of your wisdom, you

will be able to discern an appropriate model of *dhamma* to practice and follow.

A tiny flashlight may be able to shine light on your palm but it cannot illuminate that which is a great distance away. Plus, the flashlight is running low on batteries. It is important to know yourself, recognize your capabilities, and realize the best way for you to learn.



Fill in Your Own

How do you train yourself to be a good person? You can borrow good qualities from others but you would still need to train yourself. The same goes for learning *dhamma*. It is worthless to be a parakeet, repeating the *dhamma* you have heard. It is more beneficial to train yourself. You can use the very same *dhamma* topics that you have learned and make them yours as you fill in your own details.

As Luang Bu Khao often taught, do not follow the manuals, but do not neglect the manuals. The texts and manuals are merely a map to guide us as we use our own experiences to traverse the path. The Buddha said that the *dhamma* used to teach all of his disciples were like the bamboo leaves that fit into a single palm. The rest of the bamboo leaves were much more detailed topics.

Those with sufficient wisdom can take a seed of wisdom and grow it into a forest.

In contemplating the five aggregates, we examine each individually: tangible form, memory, volitional thought, feeling, and consciousness. Most practitioners attempt to form an understanding of this topic by superficially gliding over all five aggregates simultaneously. They do this in order to check off the topic as complete, but it is foolish and ineffective.

Similarly, people can receive the five precepts all at once on any particular day, but who really exemplifies all five of them on that day? At best, people can try and compel themselves to adhere to the precepts. Those precepts are then unnatural and forced. When precepts are truly upheld, they emerge from within us organically.

To uphold the five precepts, simply start with a single precept and work on that for a year, or many years. Keep that up until you are able to fully uphold all five precepts.

Likewise, you can spend your day checking off one aggregate per hour, but to do so is pointless. Contemplation of the five aggregates involves more nuances than that. You should separate the tangible form aggregate from the intangible (memory, volitional thought, feeling, consciousness), because it involves less details.

Creating a foundation on a broad and comprehensive understanding of the tangible form aggregate is crucial. Thereafter, building on your familiarity with the tangible form aggregate, you can delve into the more detailed topic of intangible aggregates. If you were just learning to paint, you would not attack the canvas with all the colors on your palette at once. You would need to begin with a sketched outline before filling in with colored paint.



Separation

Thus, begin with the tangible form aggregate. Separate that into internal and external aspects, namely, yours and all other forms. Then divide that into the two types of tangible form: that which is controlled by a life-force and that which is lifeless.

For instance, consider that your body is a form controlled by a spirit. Then, look outward and contemplate tangible forms other than yourself. Look at a tree, which contains many tangible parts that can be contemplated on: roots, bark, trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit. The human body is comprised of many elements, such as hair, nails, teeth, and skin.

After expanding on the components of a tree or human body, examine how each is inconstant. Relate all of them to the Three Common

Characteristics (impermanence, suffering, cessation of existence in a conventional form). Use both the internal and external models to form an understanding of the truth about the tangible form aggregate.

The more wisdom a person has, the more expansive and deep the contemplations will be. A single component such as hair can be contemplated upon for days. It is impermanent; it changes. Hair is suffering; white hair is undesirable and must be dyed black before stepping out in public. Hair that is too long must be cut. When hair changes, we experience stress. The same applies to nails and skin.

They can all be evaluated in terms of impermanence, suffering, not-self (*anatta*), and even filthiness (*asubha*). But do you have sufficient insight to expand on these contemplations? Mostly people skim the surface and assume that they already understand. While they are wise in a worldly sense, they lack insight in *Dhamma* aspects.



True Skills

Times have changed. Before, students could do calculations in their head, without a pencil and paper. Nowadays, if students cannot immediately solve a problem, they turn to their calculators. Is the answer correct? Yes. Are scientific innovations that provide convenience good? Yes. But are there drawbacks? Yes.

People cannot think on their own. They rely on outside tools to help them. Now, problems arise when computers cannot solve all of our problems. We will be faced with quite a challenge when we are left to our undeveloped wits to solve a problem. Thus, it is imperative that we brew our own pot of wisdom.

For a skilled practitioner, an analysis of a component like skin, for instance, can be assessed in terms of topics like impermanence, suffering,

cessation of existence in a conventional form, self belongings, eventual separation, and filthiness. These contemplations can carry on throughout days and nights.

On some days, using one of these techniques, we can mull over a topic for only ten minutes. Then at other times, we can continue thinking for hours or days. With enough wisdom, we will adapt our technique if it has brought us to a roadblock or dead end.

Again, it is important to start off with the rudimentary topic of tangible form. Why? Because it is the raw features like tangible form, scents, flavors, sights and sounds that people are drawn to. After wholly understanding these basic topics, it will be easier to move on to contemplate the more complicated topic of intangible aggregates.

Insightful contemplations will begin with raw concepts and develop into more complicated models. The more common method of tackling a group of complex topics in one fell swoop is not wrong; it is correctly aligned with concepts in

texts and manuals. However, in actual practice, it does not achieve maximum results.



Turn on the Lights

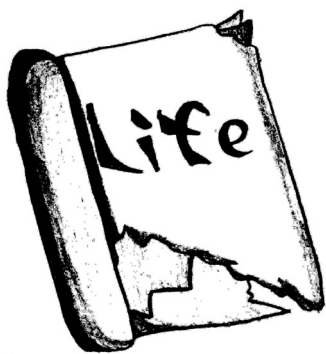
Blind people can read the raised dots in the Braille language. But they do not know green, red, or white, because they cannot see colors. Our minds are similarly blind in that we also cannot see things clearly. We are living in the dark. We need to train our wisdom in order to illuminate the truth. Without wisdom, we will continue to live blind lives.

Our unawareness of suffering, harmful consequences, and perils has bought us tickets for rebirths in this world. All we can see is that the world is beautiful and good, and that is why we are willingly and repeatedly reborn. Unless we train our wisdom and affect some kind of change, we will continue to tread the endless cycle of rebirth.

If in this lifetime we can admit that we have been duped by worldly, sensual pleasures, then we can stop the vicious cycle. We can figure out what we are infatuated with and deal with it. But the light only shines through for so long until another obsession clouds us up again. So we have to adapt and implement new methods in order to discover the truth. Look around you and use evidence within this world to uncover precisely what we are deceived by. We have to channel our wisdom to dig up and examine all of our infatuations.

To excavate without wisdom is like a blind chicken clawing at a ground where diamonds and bird feed lie scattered about. It will never eat because it doesn't realize what it has found. Just so, we can dig up our vices, but we can't do anything with them if we are just going through the actions dictated in manuals.

Without wisdom, we will never see or process what we have unearthed. There will be no end to our blindness. We should cultivate our wisdom in this lifetime, so that we can at least shine a sliver of light into the darkness.



A History Lesson

Although we cannot see into our past lives, if we can start by seeing our present life clearly, we will be able to pivot to past and future lives with clarity. Use the present life as your secure foundation. Most times, “present” is used in terms of trying to remain in the meditative now, not thinking, and not pondering the future.

In wisdom *dhamma* practice, the present life is a basis. What are the details of your present life, from birth up until today? By looking back on your life and evaluating each stage, you will be able to extrapolate the rest of your life up until your death. How do you determine when you will die? Use human life expectancy as a rough guess. Most people don't exceed this mark. Look at those before you who were unable to outrun death, and you will be able to deduce your own fate.

The present is used in wisdom contemplations in order for us to identify undeniable truths. In analyzing your life and the lives of others, the common characteristics will be evident. All beings are commonly comprised of the four elements and are subject to aging, sickness, and death. We all share these qualities.

If you see your present life clearly, you will see that your future rebirths will be a carbon copy. You will be born from your mother's womb, etch out a living and survive just like you are doing in this lifetime. You may become ill, but regardless you will ultimately die. Each of your countless future rebirths and this present life are one and the same.

There is nothing in this world that can truly belong to anyone. We are fooling ourselves as we attempt to accumulate and carry all these worldly belongings with us. There does not exist a single person in this world who has completely satisfied their each and every desire. We are born into this world because of our countless unquenchable

desires, only to develop new ones and set ourselves up for the same disappointment.

Like a gambler betting on the next round, we desperately hope to be dealt a new hand in which all of our dreams are realized. But is your current hand any better? It is the same. Some are even worse off. These hopes belong to people lacking wisdom.

Those who possess wisdom will be able to analyze all the stages of their lives starting from birth to childhood, to teenage years, all the way up to where they stand now. Within this life, they will be able to deduce where their future is headed. Upon seeing the truth, who would desire to be reborn again? No one. There's no point. The next life will only equal this one.

Seeing that the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils of a future existence are identical to this lifetime's is enough to fear rebirth. We see the natural disasters around us and the constant suffering that arises as a consequence. Upon seeing that the same formula lies ahead in the

future, why would we want to be reborn again? Likewise, after jumping out of one burning fire, who in their right mind would jump straight into another one? No one. They would find a way to escape it.



Let it End

We would not consent to another birth after all the scarring pain and suffering we have already endured in this lifetime. Why would we desire more agony? Those with insight into a future riddled with suffering will have had enough with rebirth and will stop here. It is a natural reaction for humans and animals to fear more suffering.

For example, young children crawl around and enjoy touching and playing with things including heated objects. How do parents teach their child to fear fire? Take the child's finger and hold it up to the fire until the child screams in pain. Withdraw the finger from the heat and treat it immediately. Now, at the cost of this initial sting, the child will be weary of fire. It is better than the child ending up burning itself alive.

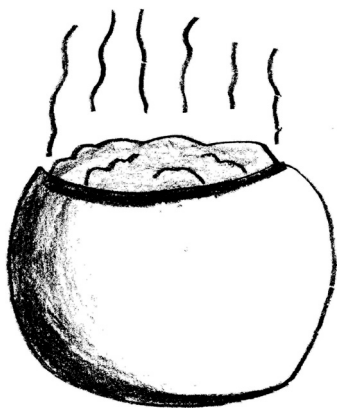
Upon experiencing the painful consequences of fire, the child will be too scared to play with fire.

Adults must also realize the suffering and negative consequences of future lives in order to withdraw themselves from rebirth. Like a person who has once felt the burn of hot chilies in their eye, they will take all steps to protect against future pain.

It is important to realize as much of the suffering, undesired consequences, and perils of your present life as possible. By thinking in a comprehensive manner it will become evident that a wife, husband, and children all arrive at the same fate. It will be clear that the past, present, and future lives are equal. When this is realized, we will be jaded and fed-up with future rebirths.

This is the how we use the present for wisdom contemplations, as opposed to how it is practiced in meditation. Both techniques should be practiced. Most people are already adept at the meditation aspect, but have not developed their skills with the wisdom method.

Use these examples as a model for practicing the wisdom take on the present. Understand the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils of this present lifetime. Realize that anything you are attached to in this lifetime will be the bridge connecting you to your future rebirth. Consequently, we should destroy this bridge.



Fully Cooked

There is a Thai folktale about *Santong*, a handsome man who wore a hideous disguise. Once his costume was burned, *Santong's* ugly appearance vanished along with it. What was left was the true *Santong*.

Our wisdom is similarly concealed with a disguise. Once we train our minds, the handsome wisdom within will be revealed. We must cultivate our own wisdom in order to genuinely realize and understand the world's truths. Solely going through the motions detailed in manuals is useless because it is not your own knowledge. This borrowed knowledge can neither solve your problems nor eliminate any vices.

Instead, regularly train your wisdom and sharpen your mindfulness, and clarity of the truth will emerge as a result. Initially, this lucidity in

perception will not arise straight away. Continue contemplating the same issues, again and again, and over time the comprehensive truth will become clear to you. It takes diligence and practice.

Someone who has never driven a car will not be able to drive off like a professional right on their first try. The amateur must first learn how to apply pressure to the pedals, how to back up, and how to drive forward. After becoming familiar with the skills, they will be able to drive more expertly.

Likewise, even with the complete set of ingredients, a novice cook cannot make five star papaya salad on their first venture. It will be too salty, too sweet, too spicy, or too sour. He must taste each batch, distinguish what went wrong and adjust the proportions for the next time. It requires both time and experience to create a perfect batch. The same goes for developing a clear and comprehensive view of the truth. It requires many models and examples over time until the evidence is sufficient to accept.

What is used to determine clarity in understanding? The extinction of doubt. This is a naturally occurring concept. Once a dish has achieved a perfect taste, stop seasoning it. If rice is fully cooked, stop cooking it. Similarly, once doubt over a particular topic is wiped out, put down the topic. Then take up one of the other topics in which you still possess doubts.

These doubts don't get wiped out all at once. It takes time to build a foundation of clear understandings. What is important is that this foundation is crafted out of your individual wisdom.

Teachers can instruct or help warn you, but they cannot fix your issues for you. You are the only one who can solve your problems. Their lessons are only a guideline, and it is up to you to practice thinking and train yourself.