



A Heart Released

The Teachings of Phra Ajahn Mun Bhuridatta Thera

Translated from the Thai by
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Introduction

Phra Ajahn Mun Bhuridatta Thera was born in 1870 in Baan Kham Bong, a farming village in Ubon Ratchathani province, northeastern Thailand. Ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1893, he spent the remainder of his life wandering through Thailand, Burma, and Laos, dwelling for the most part in the forest, engaged in the practice of meditation. He attracted an enormous following of students and, together with his teacher, Phra Ajahn Sao Kantasilo, was responsible for the establishment of the forest ascetic tradition that has now spread throughout

Thailand and to several countries abroad. He passed away in 1949 at Wat Suddhavasa, Sakon Nakhorn province.

Much has been written about his life, but very little was recorded of his teachings during his lifetime. Most of his teachings he left in the form of people: the students whose lives were profoundly shaped by the experience of living and practicing meditation under his guidance. One of the pieces that was recorded is translated here. A Heart Released (Muttodaya) is a record of passages from his sermons, made during the years 1944-45 by two monks who were staying under his guidance, and edited by a third monk, an ecclesiastical official who frequently visited him for instruction in meditation. The first edition of the book was printed with his permission for free distribution to the public. The title of the book was taken from a comment made by the Ven. Chao Khun Upali Gunupamacariya (Jan Siricando) who, after listening to a sermon delivered by Phra Ajahn Mun on the root themes of meditation, praised the sermon as having been delivered with 'muttodaya' -- a heart released -- and as conveying the heart of release.

The unusual style of Phra Ajahn Mun's sermons may be explained in part by the fact that in the days before his ordination he was skilled in a popular form of informal village entertainment called maw lam. Maw lam is a contest in extemporaneous rhyming, usually reproducing the war between the sexes, in which the battle of wits can become quite fierce. Much use is made of word play: riddles, puns, innuendoes, metaphors, and simple playing with the sounds of words. The sense of language that Ajahn Mun developed in maw lam he carried over into his teachings after becoming a monk. Often he would teach his students in extemporaneous puns and rhymes. This sort of word play he even applied to the Pali language, and a number of instances can be cited in Muttodaya: in § 3, the pun on the word dhatu, which can mean both physical element and speech element (phoneme); the use of the phonemes na mo ba dha (the basic elements in the phrase namo buddhaya, homage to the Buddha) to stand for the four physical elements; the play on namo and mano in § 4; the use of the Patthana as an image for the mind in § 5; the extraction of the word santo (peaceful) from pavessanto in § 13 and § 16; the grammatical pun on loke in § 14 and santo in § 13; the threes in § 12; the eights in § 16; and so on.

This sort of rhetorical style has gone out of fashion in the West and is going out of style today even in Thailand, but in the Thailand of Ajahn Mun's time it was held in high regard as a sign of quick intelligence and a subtle mind. Ajahn Mun was able to use it with finesse as an effective teaching method, forcing his students to become more quick-witted and alert to implications, correspondences, multiple levels of meaning, and the elusiveness of language; to be less dogmatic in their attachments to the meanings of words, and less inclined to look for the truth in terms of language. As Ajahn Mun once told a pair of visiting monks who were proud of their command of the medieval text, *The Path of Purification*, the *niddesa* (analytical expositions) on virtue, concentration, and discernment contained in that work were simply *nidana* (fables or stories). If they wanted to know the truth of virtue, concentration, and discernment, they would have to bring these qualities into being in their own hearts and minds.

§1. Practice is what keeps the true Dhamma pure.

The Lord Buddha taught that his Dhamma, when placed in the heart of an ordinary run-of-the-mill person, is bound to be thoroughly corrupted (*saddhamma-patirupa*); but if placed in the heart of a Noble One, it is bound to be genuinely pure and authentic, something that at the same time can be neither effaced nor obscured.

So as long as we are devoting ourselves merely to the theoretical study of the Dhamma, it can't serve us well. Only when we have trained our hearts to eliminate their 'chameleons' (see § 10) -- their corruptions (*upakkilesa*) -- will it benefit us in full measure. And only then will the true Dhamma be kept pure, free from distortions and deviations from its original principles.

§2. To follow the Buddha, we must train ourselves well before training others.

purisadamma-sarathi sattha deva-manussanam buddho bhagavati

Our Lord Buddha first trained and tamed himself to the point where he attained unexcelled right self-awakening (*anuttara-sammasambodhiñana*), becoming *buddho*, one who knows, before becoming *bhagava*, one who spreads the teaching to those who are to be taught. Only then did he become

sattha, the teacher and trainer of human and divine beings whose stage of development qualifies them to be trained. And thus, kalyano kittisaddo abbhuggato: His good name has spread to the four quarters of the compass even up to the present day.

The same is true of all the Noble Disciples of the past. They trained and tamed themselves well before helping the Teacher spread his teachings to people at large, and so their good name has spread just like the Buddha's.

If, however, a person spreads the teaching without first having trained himself well, papako saddo hoti: His bad name will spread to the four quarters of the compass, due to his error in not having followed the example of the Lord Buddha and all the Noble Disciples of the past.

§3. The root inheritance, the starting capital for self-training.

Why is it that wise people -- before chanting, receiving the precepts, or performing any other act of merit -- always take up namo as their starting point? Why is it that namo is never omitted or discarded? This suggests that namo must be significant. If we take it up for consideration, we find that na stands for the water element, and mo for the earth element -- and with this, a line from the scriptures comes to mind:

mata-petika-sambhavo odana-kummasa-paccayo:

'When the generative elements of the mother and father are combined, the body comes into being. When it is born from the mother's womb, it is nourished with rice and bread, and so is able to develop and grow.' Na is the mother's element; mo, the father's element. When these two elements are combined, the mother's fire element then heats the combination until it becomes what is called a kalala, a droplet of oil. This is the point where the connecting cognizance (patisandhi-viññana) can make its connection, so that the mind becomes joined to the namo element. Once the mind has taken up residence, the droplet of oil develops until it is an ambuja, a glob of blood. From a glob of blood it becomes a ghana, a rod, and then a pesi, a piece of flesh. Then it expands itself into a lizard-like shape, with five extensions: two arms, two legs, and a head.

(As for the elements ba, breath, and dha, fire, these take up residence later, because they are not what the mind holds onto. If the mind lets the droplet of oil drop, the droplet of oil vanishes or is discarded as useless. It has no breath or fire, just as when a person dies and the breath and fire vanish from the body. This is why we say they are secondary elements. The important factors are the two original elements, namo.)

After the child is born, it has to depend on na, its mother, and mo, its father, to care for it, nurturing it and nourishing it with such foods as rice and bread, at the same time teaching and training it in every form of goodness. The mother and father are thus called the child's first and foremost teachers. The love and benevolence the mother and father feel for their children cannot be measured or calculated. The legacy they give us -- this body -- is our primal inheritance. External wealth, silver or gold, come from this body. If we didn't have this body, we wouldn't be able to do anything, which means that we wouldn't have anything at all. For this reason, our body is the root of our entire inheritance from our mother and father, which is why we say that the good they have done us cannot be measured or calculated. Wise people thus never neglect or forget them.

We first have to take up this body, this namo, and only then do we perform the act of bowing it down in homage. To translate namo as homage is to translate only the act, not the source of the act.

This same root inheritance is the starting capital we use in training ourselves, so we needn't feel lacking or poor when it comes to the resources needed for the practice.

§4. The root foundation for the practice.

The two elements, namo, when mentioned by themselves, aren't adequate or complete. We have to rearrange the vowels and consonants as follows: Take the a from the n, and give it to the m; take the o from the m and give it to the

n, and then put the ma in front of the no. This gives us mano, the heart. Now we have the body together with the heart, and this is enough to be used as the root foundation for the practice. Mano, the heart, is primal, the great foundation. Everything we do or say comes from the heart, as stated in the Buddha's words:

mano-pubbangama dhamma mano-settha mano-maya:

'All dhammas are preceded by the heart, dominated by the heart, made from the heart.' The Buddha formulated the entire Dhamma and Vinaya from out of this great foundation, the heart. So when his disciples contemplate in accordance with the Dhamma and Vinaya until namo is perfectly clear, then mano lies at the end point of formulation. In other words, it lies beyond all formulations.

All supposings come from the heart. Each of us has his or her own load, which we carry as supposings and formulations in line with the currents of the flood (ogha), to the point where they give rise to unawareness (avijja), the factor that creates states of becoming and birth, all from our not being wise to these things, from our deludedly holding them all to be 'me' or 'mine'.

§5. The root cause of everything in the universe.

The seven books of the Abhidhamma, except for the Patthana (The Book on Origination), are finite in scope. As for the Patthana, it is anantanaya, infinite in scope. Only a Buddha is capable of comprehending it in its entirety. When we consider the Pali text, which begins hetu-paccayo, we find that the cause (hetu) that acts as the primal sustaining factor (paccaya) for all things in the cosmos is nothing other than the heart. The heart is the great cause -- what is primal, what is important. All things apart from it are effects or conditions. The remaining factors mentioned in the Patthana, from arammana (objective support) to aviggata (not without) can act as sustaining factors only because the great cause, the heart, comes first. Thus mano, discussed in § 4; thitibhutam, which will be discussed in § 6; and the great cause discussed here all refer to the same thing. The Buddha was able to formulate the Dhamma and Vinaya, to know things with his ten-powered intuition, and to comprehend all knowable phenomena, all because the great cause acted as the primal factor. His comprehension was thus infinite in scope. In the same way, all of the

disciples had this great cause acting as their primal factor and so were able to know in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. This is why the Venerable Assaji, the fifth of the five brethren, taught Upatissa (the Venerable Sariputta),

ye dhamma hetu-pabhava tesam hetum tathagato tesanca yo nirodho ca evam vadi mahasamano:

'Whatever dhammas arise from a cause...' This great cause being the important factor, the primal factor, then when the Venerable Assaji reached this point -- the great cause -- how could the Venerable Sariputta's mind help but penetrate down to the current of the Dhamma? -- for everything in the world comes about due to the great cause. Even the transcendent dhammas are reached by the great cause. This is why the Patthana is said to be infinite in its scope. Whoever trains the heart, the great cause, until it is clear and dazzling, is capable of knowing everything of every sort infinitely, both within and without.

§6. The root instigator of the cycle of death and rebirth.

thitibhutam avijja-paccaya sankhara...upadanam...bhavo...jati...

Each and every one of us born as a human being has a birthplace: we have our parents as our birthplace. So why did the Buddha formulate the teaching on sustained conditions only from the factor of unawareness onwards? What unawareness comes from, he didn't say. Unawareness has to have a mother and father just as we do, and we learn from the above line that thitibhutam is its mother and father. Thitibhutam refers to the primal mind. When the primal mind is imbued with delusion, there is a sustaining factor: the condition of unawareness. Once there is unawareness, it acts as the sustenance for the fashioning of sankhara, mental fashionings, together with the act of clinging to them, which gives rise to states of becoming and birth. In other words, these things will have to keep on arising and giving rise to each other continually. They are thus called sustained or sustaining conditions because they support and sustain one another.

Awareness and unawareness both come from thitibhutam. When thitibhutam is imbued with unawareness, it isn't wise to its conditions; but when it is imbued with awareness, it realizes its conditions for what they really are. This is

how the matter appears when considered with the clear insight leading to emergence (vutthana-gamini vipassana).

To summarize: Thitibhutam is the primal instigator of the cycle of death and rebirth. Thus it is called the root source of the three (see § 12). When we are to cut the cycle of death and rebirth so that it disconnects and vanishes into nothingness, we have to train the primal instigator to develop awareness, alert to all conditions for what they really are. It will then recover from its delusion and never give rise to any conditions again. Thitibhutam, the root instigator, will stop spinning, and this will end our circling through the cycle of death and rebirth.

§7. The supreme position: the foundation for the paths, fruitions, and nibbana.

aggam thanam manussesu maggam satta-visuddhiya:

'The supreme position is to be found among human beings: the path to the purification of living beings.' This can be explained as follows: We have received our legacy from namo, our parents -- i.e., this body, which has taken a human birth, the highest birth there is. We are supreme beings, well-placed in a supreme position, complete with the treasures of thought, word, and deed. If we want to amass external treasures, such as material wealth, money, and gold, we can. If we want to amass internal treasures, such as the extraordinary qualities of the paths, their fruitions, and nibbana, we also can. The Buddha formulated the Dhamma and Vinaya for us human beings, and not at all for cows, horses, elephants, and so on. We human beings are a race that can practice to reach purity. So we shouldn't be discouraged or self-deprecating, thinking that we are lacking in worth or potential, because as human beings we are capable. What we don't have, we can give rise to. What we already have, we can make greater. This is in keeping with the teaching found in the Vessantara Jataka:

danam deti, silam rakkhati, bhavanam bhavetva, ekacco saggam gacchati,
ekacco mokkham gacchati, nissanayam:

'Having worked at amassing wisdom through being charitable, observing the precepts, and developing the mind in line with the teachings of the Lord Buddha, those who work only a little will have to go to heaven, while those

who are determined and really do the work -- and at the same time having the help of the potential and perfections they have developed in the past -- will reach nibbana without a doubt. '

Common animals are said not to be supreme because they can't act as human beings can. So it is rightly said that human beings are well-placed in a supreme position, able to lead themselves to the paths, their fruitions, and to pure nibbana.

§8. The stronghold that forms the practice area for training oneself.

In which set of principles did the Lord Buddha establish our stronghold? When we consider this question, we find that he established our stronghold in the great frames of reference (satipatthana).

To make a comparison with worldly affairs: In armed battles where victory is at stake, it is necessary to find a stronghold. If one obtains a good stronghold, one can successfully ward off the weapons of the enemy; and there one can accumulate great strength to launch an attack, driving the enemy to defeat. Such a place is thus called a stronghold, i.e., a place complete with strong stockades, gates, moats and embattlements.

So it is with the affairs of the Dhamma when we take the great frames of reference as our stronghold, in that those who go into battle with the enemy -- defilement -- must start out by keeping track of the body as their frame of reference, because when such things as sensual passion arise, they arise at the body and mind. Because the sight of a body causes the mind to be aroused, we can conclude that the body is the provocation, and so we must examine the body as a means of stilling the Hindrances (nivarana) and calming the mind. This is a point that you should work at and develop as much as possible. In other words, keep investigating that point without giving way at all. When an image (uggaha nimitta) of any part of the body arises, take that part of the body as the basic theme for your investigation. You don't have to go shifting to other parts. To think that, 'I've already seen this part. Other parts I haven't seen, so I'll have to go and investigate other parts,' isn't advisable at all. Even if

you investigate the body until you have it analyzed minutely into all of its parts that are composed of the properties (dhatu) of earth, water, fire, and wind -- this is called patibhaga -- you should still keep examining the body as it first appeared in the original image until you have it mastered. To master it, you have to examine that same point over and over again, just as when you chant. If you memorize a particular discourse and then leave it, without chanting or repeating it again, you will forget it, and it won't serve any purpose, due to your complacency in not mastering it. The same holds true in your investigation of the body. Once an image of any part arises, if you don't investigate it repeatedly, and instead heedlessly let it pass, it won't serve any purpose at all.

This investigation of the body has many citations, one being in our present-day ordination ceremony. Before all else, the preceptor must tell the ordinand the five meditation themes -- hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin, i.e., this very body -- because of their importance. In the Commentary to the Dhammapada, it is said that an unwise preceptor who doesn't teach the investigation of the body may destroy his pupil's potential for arahantship. So at present the preceptor must first teach the five meditation themes.

In another spot the Buddha taught that there is no such thing as a Buddha or an arahant who has not fixed on at least one part of the body as a meditation theme. Thus he told a group of 500 monks who were discussing the earth -- saying that such and such a village had red soil or black soil, etc. -- that they were discussing external earth when they should be investigating internal earth. In other words, they should have been investigating this body intelligently, penetrating it throughout and making it absolutely clear. When the Buddha finished his discussion of this topic, all 500 monks reached the fruition of arahantship.

From this we can conclude that the investigation of the body must be important. Each and every person who is to gain release from all suffering and stress has to investigate the body. If we are to accumulate great strength, we must accumulate it by investigating the body. Even the Lord Buddha, when he was about to attain Awakening, started out by investigating the breath -- and what is the breath, if not the body?

So the great frames of reference, starting with the contemplation of the body, are said to be our stronghold. Once we have obtained a good stronghold -- i.e., once we have put the principles of the great frames of reference into practice until we have them mastered -- we should then investigate things as they are in terms of the inherent nature of their elements, using the strategies of clear insight, which will be discussed next.

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