

## Pilgrimage in Thailand

January 2017

“Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me leading wherever I chose.  
Henceforth I ask not good fortune, I myself am good-fortune,  
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,  
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,  
Strong and content I travel the open road” (Walt Whitman).

And from: “Tales of freedom” by Vessantara from the Western Buddhist Order.

“With wisdom comes a serene withdrawal  
from the cares of the world. We may still  
act within it, but we no longer have expectations of it.  
So, it no longer disturbs us.”

### **Our Day**

The pilgrimage was quite an adventure/enterprise, at least for those of us who did it for the first time.

To be open to what was going to happen, not to know where we would go, what we would do, etc....were good starting points as from the above quotes. So, we began after a few days at Kanjanabhisek (base

camp) to acclimatise and wait for us all to arrive from all over the world. The day would start at 4 am – right in the middle of the night – when the call bell would wake up most of us for the first chanting, meditation and talk in the temple. Needless to say, not all of us were there sitting and ready at 4.30 and also a few of those, who had braved the early morning rise, were still seen head drooping on their chest...!

Anyway, the day had started, followed by the alms round at 6.15. This is a most beautiful and moving experience: walking in a row like little Indians, we followed the head monk or nun holding their bowls, while we had cotton bags around our shoulders to fill up as the bowls filled up with donated, freshly cooked rice and other foods generously offered by the pious and devoted villagers. Leaving the darkness of the night behind us, we walked into the rising sun, barefooted some of us and sandal footed others.

On returning to the temple we would empty our bags on the kitchen table for the preparation of the first and only meal of the day. We gathered in the temple for further chanting and meditation before that meal. Those on eight precepts, though, could eat even after 12 o'clock and a later evening meal. Thai delicacies and other mysterious, colourful concoctions awaited us along the table by the temple. After the monastics, we would help ourselves and consume the meal either alone or with others, silently or chatting-ly. Helping in the kitchen, sweeping dry leaves, fixing the toilet (Bruce our dear plumber from Manchester), then walking to Phu Wieng to shop, have coffee, then chanting, meditating, bowing, and listening in the temple, would fill the rest of the stationary days. These were the rare days we stayed at base camp. But most of the other days we would drive off at about 9ish, by the time the morning, endless delays were over - hours later than the planned departure hours. We would be driven from locality to locality, from temple to temple, visiting and paying respects to Luangpohs, who

practice the living example of the Buddha's qualities. We chanted to be reminded of the good qualities of the Buddha, listen to Dharma talks and drink the offered coffees and teas! One day we walked to the cave of Wat Tham Pah Wieng where Luangpoh Sudhiro spent 8 years in solitary meditation on the breath. Then we walked to the Mekong river – a reminder to some of us of the terrible Vietnam war; a hot midday walk to a solitary temple on a hill with the view of standing Buddhas in the distance. These trips were a pleasant change to our more spiritual, meditative days.

Setting up our mosquito tents was a “must” before sunset and evening meditation, chanting, talk and then final drink and chats before disappearing into the well-deserved night sleep.

The above was the general unfolding of the day; here below are the details of our days. The numbers in brackets refer to the talks detailed in another file.

### **Daily Itineraries**

#### **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January: Base camp at Wat Pah Kanjanabhisek.**

Today we visit a couple of local temples while still waiting for pilgrims from various countries to gather at Wat Pah Kanjanabhisek. The first temple at Wat Pah Kittiyanusorn, has a **huge**, impressive, white, reclining Buddha. The other one is a huge Buddha made with java and sitting inside the temple at Wat Tam Pah Gurn (Kurn).

#### **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January: Wat Pah Kanjanabhisek to Wat Tam Pah Wieng.**

After the usual early morning meditation, alms round and breakfast/meal we leave for Wat Tam Pah Wieng – the cave where L. Sudhiro spent 8 years meditating on the breath.

#### **Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> January: Wat Tam Pah Wieng to Wat Pah Dong Nong Kok**

A Dhamma talk (1) in the cave by Tam Tui (check) on the 4 Brahma Viharas. Then we drive to the Temple of the Fallen Tree at Wat Pah Dong Nong Kok. Talk by L. Hud Paragammo (2).

Comment [mp1]:

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January: Wat Pah Dong Nong Kok (for two nights.)**

Two talks at 8.30 then 12 noon (3 and 4) in the temple, the first one by.....? and the second one by the temple Luangpoh, on dharma and samsara.

### **Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January: Wat Pah Dong Nong Kok**

Talk at 9 am by Aj. Brahmavara (5) on the Five Hindrances (6) on giving and forgiveness

Talk (7) by ??? in the afternoon on purity of mind and the defilements

Talk (8) and (9) two talks in the cave: one by Aj Brahmavara and the other by ...(ask ???)

### **Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> January Wat Pah Dong Nong Kok to Base Camp at W.P. Kanjanabhisek**

Dharma talk (10) at the temple of....(ask... ???) by Luangpoh ??? on many, interesting Buddhist ideas, questions and answers. On the way back to base camp, we stop at the temple of Luangpoh Mun in Udon Thani - which is the biggest Forest Monk Temple even of USA - . At this temple of Wat Pah Bodhi, we met Tan Suwit (11): he spoke of karma, forgiveness and answered questions beautifully (11). We also paid respect to Luangpoh Khaw, who died at 105 years of age! (**CHECK...?**). Talk by L Sudhiro (12) back at camp base.

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January: Base camp and daily visit to a memorial stupa shaped like four elephants facing the four directions and dedicated to Aj. Kaew.**

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> January: Base Camp** and day of rest. Most people (not me) went to a monastery near Kanjanabhisek, where the monks recited the Patimokkha and Mae Chee Varada and Aj Brahmavara reaffirmed their precept.

Peter gave one talk on losses and their transformation by generosity and giving.

### **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January: Kanjanabhisek to Ubon Ratchathani**

As usual, we have to be ready by 7am and leave around 9 am! Thai time table, indeed! A very long drive of about 7 hours: tiredness (and some ... despair!) but great relief brought by the children playing “hi five” and the welcoming families when we finally get to Ubon Ratchathani. Today L. Sudhiro spoke of simplicity. We camped in the wood of the future site of a stupa, that commemorates the Laotian Sangharaja, who died a year ago at the age of 100.

**Saturday 14th January: Ubon Ratchathani to Wat Pah Bpu Bang**

Good start of the day by being awoken by chanting in the temple just next to our tents. Talk by L Sudhiro (12) on the Four Noble Truths. A long and hot drive today; we visited Aj. Mun’s birthday place monastery and the hilltop caves where Aj Mum and Aj. Sao meditated. At Wat Pah Bpu Bang temple Luangpoh Best gave a talk in English.

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> January: Wat Pah Bpu Bang to Khong Chiam ( at the junction of Mun river and Mekong)**

Usual morning routine then a short drive to Khong Chiam where we all have acupuncture by generous Dr. Poh Tang. We walk across the field and rocks under the hot, midday sun to the Mekong river – reminiscent me of the Vietnam war! – Two huge Buddha rupas stand up majestically from the plane. We meditated somewhere here. Mae Chee Varada lived here for many years.

**Monday 16th January: Khong Chiam to L Sudhiro’s sister cottages in Ubon Ratchathani area**

After a romantic moon night on the Mekong river bank and more acupuncture, we drive off to Wat Nong Pah Pong temple then to Wat Pah Nanachat ( or Baan Taad???) the Memorial site of Ajahn Chah, on one anniversary of his death. However, as one minibus got lost, we arrived when the ceremony with hundreds of monks from all over the world... was over. A talk by L. Sudhiro and meditation in the Wat Pah Baan Taad temple (??? Check) made it up a little (10). Moving devotion and respects by all the Thai people congregated here.

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January: From Ubon Ratchamani at L Sudhiro’s sister’s cottages to Amnat Charoen (ask???)**

Usual morning routine and Dhamma talk in the Tea Temple by... (Peter or Sudhiro?) (11).

Sophon Aka Pong Khantiko (his name means patience and L. Sudhiro (12) coincidentally gave a talk on patience, I think, later today!. We went to Mae Chee Kaew's Monastery and memorial stupa, met the Mae Chees and spent the night there. We pitched our tents under a big roof and were serenaded by cats...!

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January: Amnat Charoen to Khon Kaen.** We went to Aj. Jam's monastery: he died, aged 103. five years ago. The men slept there while we went to Khon Kaen to Wat Arun, where we met Luang Por Yai. We spent the night and slept at a Thai culture and meditation centre. Here I am not sure and 2 or 3 days are confused...

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January: Khon Kaen to Base camp.** Today is the 99<sup>th</sup> day since the death of the Thai King. Big preparation for tomorrow i.e. the 100<sup>th</sup> day since the death of their beloved King. Many monks will ordain for the occasion and cedar wood, scented flowers will fall from the sky/heaven to symbolise tears for the dead king. The major is also present today. Also we visited the University of Mahamakut, where we met some of the students of Peter and Elisabeth's, who teach English there. We returned to base camp by the late afternoon.

## **Snippets from Dhamma talks, questions, answers, reflections etc.**

With reference to the daily itinerary here are excerpts from the Dhamma Talks

### **Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> January**

#### **Talk (1) by Tam Tui (I think)**

The talk was given inside the cave where L. Sudhiro spent 8 years meditating on mindfulness of the breath. The talk, translated by Rina, was on the four ***Brahma Viharas: Metta***, the good will not to fall into unwholesome states and good will for oneself and others not to harm anybody. ***Compassion, Joy*** and ***Equanimity***. Strong will and perseverance are necessary in the practice as well as bare attention on which one of the Brahma Viharas we are focusing on. This bare attention will become – with practice - natural for us. L Sudhiro replied to a question: to do things in order to get merit is indeed not very pure but it is human, we need desires and wholesome desires are ok to get to the higher plane of enlightenment.

#### **Evening talk by L. Hud Paragammo (2)**

We learn the Buddha practice from seeing, hearing, listening and sensing.

We practice Buddhism in order to achieve happiness, enlightenment, nirvana. The noble friends help us on the path: sila (morality), Samadhi (concentration), panna (insight). Rupa and nama i.e. body and mind/spirit.

### **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January**

**Talk by the Luang Poh of the Temple of the Fallen Tree (3)** The Dhamma is in everything; the way is to experience and we have to choose wholesome actions and discard unwholesome ones.

**Noon talk by .... (4) at.....** The cycle of life and death (samsara) is determined by our Karma, which is unpredictable. Now we are born as human but could be re-born as cows in between many human lives. The Eightfold Noble Path is

needed to escape samsara and not to be re-born; 4 practices are involved in the path: mindfulness of body, of mind, of feelings and of dhamma. We have to focus on one of these four practices. We need both the theory: to read, study, listen and the practice via Vipassana. When the mind is peaceful, we can contemplate on our body and its parts: bones, flesh, blood and we see that our body is not clean, not adorable nor pure. All the body parts have dukkah, anicca and anatta. The aim of the practice is to get to the end of suffering.

3 pm talk (5) by ??? at ???

### Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January

#### Talk (6) at 9 am by Aj Brahmavara on the Five Hindrances

Every place gives the opportunity to do good, live together in harmony and offer help to others. Give offerings, dhamma and forgiveness skilfully. G

Give people another chance, offer proper speech that will cause no harm but good. Give without expecting anything in return.

#### Talk (7) 5pm where???? By whom????

The core of Buddhism is about the nature of the world: arising and ceasing: the law of Karma. Everything that arises has a Karma. The mind is the boss and has power over the body follows; both mind and body follow the law of nature. Purity of mind will lead to success. The Buddha said that the mind is pure, clean, and transparent (like the innocent infant in the mother's womb). Purity decreases with growing up: the defilements step in: greed, hatred and delusions enslave us: we become slaves of these visitors like a glass that accumulates dust. Ajahn Chah used to say: "The nature of the mind is stillness; the wind of emotions stir up that stillness and a tornado filled with scary passions step in. We need to elevate ourselves from such passions".

#### Talk (8) and (9) in the cave at ..... where L Sudhiro spent & years and was impressed by the clear, bright light of the stars. WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER CAVE?

No notes available on these two talks.

**Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> January Talk ( 10) by Luang Poh...??? at Metta Village**

He congratulated us for being here: we must not procrastinate any chance to do good and to practice. We have to repay our parents for bringing us up (and giving us life, I would say). Buddha's mother was a queen, who died 7 days after his birth; she went up to heaven in the 7<sup>th</sup> Vassa and she was reborn a Deva. Buddha went up and taught her and she became a Sa...???, i.e. someone who does not go back to lower state of existence. Buddhism is now 2500 years old and Buddha said that after his death the teacher will be the teaching of Buddhism itself. We told us the story of Patachara who went mad because afflicted by too many losses. When she met the Buddha she was healed and became an arahant, I think.

**Talk (11) by Tan Swit at Wat Pah Bodhi, Udon Thani.** He was a novice at 11 year of age and now is 55. He runs a foundation for 1200 kids aged 12 to 25 and he answered all our questions very satisfactorily, such as the one on Karma, To change our Karma, which is indeed possible, we have to practice loving kindness and forgiveness. He offered us drinks indoor. To kill oneself is bad but to kill one's parents is even worse and one goes to hell. What about compassion for the despairing one???? The intentions are most important

**Talk by L. Sudhiro (12)** back at base camp. We chant a lot to be reminded of the good qualities of the Buddha and to witness such qualities, not to ask for things. The qualities of the awakened Buddha are inside us all. We pay respect to the Buddha.

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup>, Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> and Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January no talks.**

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January**

**Talk (12) by L. Sudhiro** on the Four Noble Truths

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> and Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January NO TALKS, just travel.**

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January talk (13)** by L. Sum Pong Khantiko on patience in the practice. His name coincidentally means “patience”!

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January, talk (14)** by L. Mai at Khon Khaen who spoke for a long, long time in the heat ... and he said interesting things... not written though!

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January Khon Kaen to Base camp.** Today is the 99<sup>th</sup> day since the death of the Thai King and big preparations are made for a big celebration and ordination of monks. The major is present today. We visited the University of Mohamakut, where we met some of the students of Peter and Elisabeth’s, who teach English there. We return to base camp.

**In the evening we had a group feedback from us all sitting in the temple.**

Comments: gratitude, forbearance, inspiration, request for forgiveness, magical atmosphere, successful living together with many, unknown fellow pilgrims, example given by others and Luangpoh, supportive practicing together, moving experience of giving and receiving at alms round, love, dedication, heart opening, being in the present moment, accept the way it is, a shift from rigidity to be softer,, thoughts of life and death, family atmosphere, feeling of fatherhood, patience, practice without expectations, trust and faith in the Dhamma, , no judgement, let go of suffering,