

Bright and Shining Mind In a Disabled Body

Kampol Thongbunnum

A book of great inspiration

Bright and Shining Mind in a Disabled Body

Kampol Thongbunnum

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Nowadays ...
I am fully resigned
From suffering.

Most people
Live in suffering
Without knowing
Only when happiness
Gradually fades away
That suffering
Shows its face
Then and there
Not perceiving suffering
One consequently fails
To find the way out
And to get rid of suffering
Once and for all ...

– Khun Kampol

“Ye dukkhaṃ nappajānanti, atho dukkhassa sambhavaṃ;
Yattha ca sabbaso dukkhaṃ, asesam uparujjhati;
Taṅca maggaṃ na jānanti, dukkhūpasamagāminam.

“Whoever does not directly know suffering, the coming into existence of suffering, and where all suffering entirely ceases without remainder; therefore does not know the path leading to the quieting of suffering.

“Cetovimuttihīnā te, atho paññāvimuttiyā;
Abhabbā te antakiriya, te ve jātijarūpagā.

“Inferior in release of thoughts, and without release through wisdom; an end cannot be made of this continuous cycle to birth and aging.

– Suttanipātapāḷi 3.12

*Bright and Shining Mind
In a Disabled Body*

Preface

First Edition

We are all aware that life is uncertain and that birth, old age, and sickness are common to all nature from which nobody can escape. This fact seems to be so easy to see that it seems to be at the tip of everyone's tongue. When anyone has a problem in life, that kind of advice will normally be given. However, in a most unfortunate circumstance, what should you do if you happen to experience such a problem yourself? That is you become not just normally ill but severely disabled. The whole body is paralyzed with only movement in the head and arms. You are permanently bed-ridden, unable to look after yourself, unable even to relief your bladder and bowels.

In the worst scenario, there seems to be no hope in life. You probably couldn't help but feel that from now on you only have to live just to pay back your kamma resulting from whatever you did in the past, and wait to die. While you can still breathe, you have to suffer on your own, feeling angry and wondering why it has to be 'Me'.

But do you have to end up like that? Is it true that you don't have any options other than to feel miserable and waiting for the day of your death? The answer from Khun Kampol Thongbunnum is "No". You may be paralyzed but it doesn't mean that you have to suffer and be miserable. It may be true that one cannot avoid physical pains, but one can keep one's mind happy. After all, it is only the body that is disabled, the mind is not.

Khun Kampol has proved that life for disabled people is not just about waiting to die or living only so as to pay back kamma. Disabled people, on the contrary, can create new kamma, new actions, and improve their lives. The new kamma created is the practice of Dhamma or Kammaṭṭhāna (training the mind to develop tranquility and insight). The Lord Buddha's teaching is universal. It can be followed by anyone regardless of gender, age, or status. Physical disability is no obstacle at all.

Khun Kampol has practiced Dhamma based on Satipaṭṭhāna (the foundations of awareness) following Luang Por Teean's approach. The focus is on being fully aware of bodily movements without getting involved with concoctions of the mind or thoughts that keep coming and going without being invited. With this approach, he became increasingly aware until awareness is firmly and sufficiently established to observe thoughts, seeing through thoughts, and finally gaining insight into the nature and the three characteristics of the mind.

At the same time his awareness and clear perception of the bodily and mental activities have enabled him to realize that the body and the mind are separate. At this point, he gained the insight that disability is only related to the body, not the mind. Khun Kampol described the experience at this moment that, "the mind has resigned from the disabled body. It has detached itself from the body to be with awareness (knowing, feeling, sensing)". The mind is therefore free from the body's condition and no longer carries any burden or suffers because of the disabled body.

Khun Kampol's experience from his Dhamma practice that enables him to overcome the disability and transform his life is not just for himself, but is for everyone. Anyone can experience this, not only disabled or gravely ill people. Ordinary people with normally functioning body can also gain benefit from such experience. One may not be disabled, but isn't it true that one suffers physically and psychologically all the time?

This book conveys a message of hope to everyone. However great our suffering is, whatever difficulties there are in our lives, we can be free from it. This book brings great hope to us all.

Venerable Phra Pisarn Visalo
Vudhidham Fund
For the Study and Practice of Dhamma

Translator's Introduction

This is a remarkable story of Khun Kampol Thongbunnum, a Thai man, whose life has been turned upside down by an accident that left him paralyzed from his neck downwards. In his search to come to terms with his predicament, he has discovered the path in Buddhism, the training of the mind, and in particular the development of awareness under Luang Por Teean's approach, which invokes the Knowing nature within all human-beings that finally led to the transformation of his life.

The author shared his experience in a book written in Thai. The journey of his life, from the state of despair to hope and happiness, has inspired me to translate this book into English so that it could be appreciated by readers in the wider world. I sincerely hope that his life story will be inspirational to everyone who is searching for the Truth. I also hope that it can have positive effects on the mind of people who, because of many distractions in life, have neglected 'Sati' or 'Awareness' and as a result live their lives in heedlessness, which not only makes their own lives miserable and unsatisfactory but also adversely affects others. Being self-aware of what one is doing is the first step to get to know oneself, to understand one's own actions and their consequences. This first small step will lead to something greater and more meaningful, not only to individuals who take it, but also to the society as a whole.

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has helped make this translation possible, especially to Manapo Bhikkhu at the Forest Hermitage, Warwick, England, who kindly proofread the section to do with practicing Dhamma, and to Steven Coulsting who proofread the remainder. I dedicate the merits, from translating this gift of Dhamma, first of all to my parents, teachers, good friends who have been kind and supportive to me, and to all beings, including victims of all types of crime, who die or suffer in unfortunate circumstances, and to the perpetrators, who cause grievance through ignorance and lack of 'Awareness' so that they may start to contemplate their actions and their consequences. I particularly dedicate the merit to the teenage girl who was murdered in May 2005 in England as I felt this tragedy very keenly and was motivated to translate this book.

Luang Por Teean's dynamic meditation can be practiced by anyone in the world. Following the experience of Khun Kampol will enable readers to develop awareness in their daily lives and rediscover the Knowing nature within themselves. I hope this book is instrumental to your finding peace and happiness and consequently spreading love and compassion throughout the world.

Kanlaya Coulsting
Translator

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Poverty
A drive for success

There is a positive side to study
when one is in a state of scarcity.
Scarcity helps to restrain one's mind
from craving for unnecessary things in life.
If one has everything at one's disposal,
being very comfortable,
one may lose oneself in the luxury of comfort.
One's mind may be let loose; it may "go astray".
One may not have completed one's study.
Come to think of it, one feels thankful to poverty.
It is one of many forces
behind one's achievement in education.

My dreams and ambitions

I pictured myself in a uniform,
carrying out my duties as a teacher.
It made me feel so proud
that I had finally found happiness in my life.
I decided that from now on
I would carry out my duty to the best of my ability.
I would listen to my superiors, and would not argue.
I would work hard so that
I could be promoted
to a higher position in the civil service.
Once I had money,
I would have a house built for my father and mother.
They would be able to leave their boat
and come to live peacefully in their old age.
I would support my younger siblings in their education.
After that I would become ordained as a monk,
And later I would get married
and have a family of my own.
My life would be happy ever after.
Those were my dreams at that time.

An unexpected accident.

I was diving into the pool.

When my head reached the surface of the water,
instead of pushing my head up
so that my entire body would be
parallel to the surface of the water,
my head went straight to the bottom of the pool.
And that was the cause of this accident.

Disabled for life

Following a physical examination,
the doctor at Central Hospital found that
my fifth neck bone was broken.

This affected the central nervous system
and caused my whole body to be paralyzed
and without sensation.

I could only lie still,
and was immobile.

The doctor was unable to cure me.

I was to remain disabled like this
for the rest of my life.

For my father

I dedicate all the merits from the publishing of this book to my late father Chit Tongbunnum, who passed away on 5 February 2001. He was the one who introduced me to the study and practice of the Dhamma from which I have gained some satisfactory results. I have found the path to the cessation of suffering, and have been practicing until my suffering has lessened. My father also practiced the Dhamma as an example until the last day of his life.

Kampol Tongbunnum

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Background

I am a child of poor people who lived on a boat. I was born in May, 1955, at Nakhon Sawan, Thailand. I am the third child among five children, three boys and two girls. I was born and spent my life on the boat, without any house on land. Since I can remember, my father and mother had been running our motorized boat along Chao Phraya River, earning their living from doing work, such as towing goods, for other people. I always heard my father and mother talk about the hardship of life on the boat. It was difficult, risky, and sometimes could be fatal, like when there was a big storm with strong winds causing boats to clash with one another. Sometimes the boat capsized and one's belongings got damaged. Living on a boat was also difficult. When they had to set off on a journey at night, there would be no chance to sleep, and when it's time to eat, they had to eat in a hurry. The hardship was such that they did not want us to follow in their footsteps. They would like all their children to lead a different lifestyle, to live and work on land. They would be the last generation living on the boat. Father sometimes gave me direct experiences of hardship. This usually happened during the time in which we were going to set off on a journey at night. Before I went to bed, Father would summon me to talk to him at the place where he was controlling the boat. I would sit side by side with him and he would advise me and teach me about many things. The talk lasted a long time. I felt very sleepy and very cold too. It was really a torture. I think he probably did that so I could have a taste of hardship, and would be encouraged to study hard to escape from the hard life on the boat. **All of us were taught to swim so we could help ourselves when we fell into the river.** Before we started school, Father taught us to read and do sums. We were able to read and do our sums reasonably well. I gave a name to this school, calling it a "**Boat School**", not a "**Navy College**" though.

In 1962, I was seven years old. At that time, children of boat people had no opportunity to go to school because they did not have a proper residence. I was fortunate because the Government built a school especially for children of boat people. It is a good disciplinary school under the Ministry of Education. Its name is Bang Kruoy Educational Welfare School, at Tambon Bang Kruoy, Bang Kruoy District, Nonthaburi Province. Since I had done some study in our boat school, I did not have to start in Year One of Primary school. I was allowed to start in Year Two. Bang Kruoy Educational Welfare School was on the bank of Chao Phraya river, next to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand. Teachers taught us to help ourselves. However, I did not like school. I preferred to be on the boat because I missed my parents. Every weekend when there was nothing to do, I would sit at the pier in front of the school, watching boats go by, and thinking to myself, "When will our boat come passing by?". At the end of each term, we were allowed to go home and I would be looking forward to being collected by my parents.

Since my parents were not there to take care of me, I felt deprived of love and intimacy so I did not do well at school. But I was able to look after myself. I finally finished Year 7 of Primary School and was in the first group of pupils graduating from that school. I thought I would be able to return to the boat but instead I had to continue my study. This was because of Mr. Thawee Saengma, the head teacher, who encouraged me to continue my study at another school and allowed me to live at the first school.

In 1968, I went on to secondary school education at Bang Kruoy School, which was four kilometers away. After breakfast, I had to rush to school before the beginning of lessons. On days when I had no money, I had to run there and then ran back to be in time for evening meals. At Bang Kruoy School, **I loved Physical Education. I never missed school because of this subject.** I also enrolled to become a member of the school football team. I was a goal keeper and loved training in the evenings, even willing to miss my evening meal to do trainings instead. Because of my love of sports, my academic subjects suffered. However, in the last term at the end of Mathayomsuksa 3¹, I passed the exam and came first among fifty students in our class, with only 59%. My father was not very proud of me but my mother bought me a pair of jeans from a market stall as a reward.

After that, Teacher Thawee Saengma, seeing that I was keen on sports, encouraged me to continue my study in physical education, but I had to complete Mathayomsuksa 5² first. Studying at the higher secondary level at that time was hard work. Some students repeated an academic year twice and still failed. My academic results were not that good, so Teacher Thawee Saengma steered me towards teacher's training education which was easier than Mathayomsuksa 5.

In 1971, I took the entrance exam to enter Chan Kasem Teachers College for the higher certificate for teachers of primary education. I still lived at the first school, but using it only as a dormitory. I could not eat there because I had to go to college before dawn and by the time I came back it was night time. I had to be extra careful with money while studying at the teachers college because of my limited budget. Spending more than a day's budget meant I had to starve. I ate just enough to satisfy my hunger as I had to pay for every meal. A grade system was used at the College and I could hardly understand it, so I did not do well at the beginning. But I liked sports. I joined sports every day. After finishing my study each day, I would stroll to see people doing their training, such as football. I would very much like to join them but I was too small and had not got the same level of skills as they did. Footballers at that college were all professional. I could not compete so I did not have courage to join them. When I walked to the volleyball court, I saw a few people practicing. I watched them. Sometimes a ball happened to roll outside, I would throw it back to help them. I kept on doing this during the following days. One day while I was busy catching up with the ball, the teacher supervising the team came into the court and told the players to get in line. I put the ball into the net in a hurry. As I was about to walk away, I heard a voice calling from behind. "Little brother, don't go. Get in the line with us". It was a senior female volleyball player. I was thinking how I could join them because I was not a player. I was reluctant but the teacher was looking at me, so I decided to run to get in the line with them. I ended up practicing

¹ "Mathayomsuksa 3" was the final year of the lower secondary education in the old educational system in Thailand. It was equal to the current Year 10 in the English School system, and Year 10 in a Junior High School in the USA.

² "Mathayomsuksa 5" was the final year of the higher secondary education in the old educational system in Thailand. It was equal to Year 12 in the English School system, and Year 12 in a Senior High School in the USA.

volleyball with players senior to me every day. On the day players were to be selected to form a college team, twelve players were required, and there were twelve people for selection. I happened to be the twelfth person at the end of the line. I finally became the smallest volleyball player for Chan Kasem Teachers College.

During my study, if I had any problem, Mr. Sakol Kamnoetsiri would be there to help me. He was a teacher who supervised students at the hall where I was staying. As a senior student, I was assigned the duty of helping to look after students in that hall. Teacher Sakol Kamnoetsiri was very friendly to me; he treated me as if I was his younger brother. If I was short of money, he would lend it to me. But the important thing was that he helped me with problems I had with my study. I finally completed my study at Chan Kasem Teachers College and was selected to continue my study to the Higher Certificate level for teachers of secondary education at the very same college on the grounds that I was a college sportsman. However, I did not take up the offer because I wanted to continue my study to obtain a higher certificate to teach Physical Education in secondary schools.

In 1973, I took the entrance exam to enter Mahasarakham Physical Education College in Mahasarakham Province. Mr. Thawee Saengma, the head teacher at my first school, asked Ms. Srimuang Srisuwan, a physical education teacher at Bang Kruoy Educational Welfare School, to arrange for me to continue my further education at Mahasarakham Physical Education College. Teacher Srimuang Srisuwan was a female teacher who was brave and strong. She was confident to speak out and do things, but in a very kind way. She took me to enrol at the college in Mahasarakham herself. I was excited at the chance of studying in another province as far as the northeast of Thailand. I had never had any opportunity to study so far away like this before. Neither was I aware that there was such a province called Mahasarakham on the map of Thailand.

At Mahasarakham Physical Education College, I thoroughly enjoyed my study so I worked very hard. What impressed me was personality of the teachers who were sports talents. Some of them were members of a national team. I therefore paid special attention to my study and worked hard. When one does something that one enjoys, one will do well at it. When one learns a subject that one is good at, the results are naturally good. At this college, there was a variety of sports to choose. I enrolled to become a team member of four sports; volleyball, football, hockey, and fencing. As a swimming pool had not been built, students had to go somewhere else to learn to swim. As a result, I did not enrol to be one of the college swimmers. I finally completed my course at Mahasarakham Physical Education College and obtained a higher certificate of secondary education, and was also selected to further my study without having to take any entrance exam.

In 1975 I went to study at Sri Nakharinwirot Physical Education University in Bangkok while continuing to live at Bang Kruoy Educational Welfare School. My parents wanted me to achieve the highest possible level of education as they could afford. Despite the slim chance due to shortage of funds, my parents tried their best to find the means to support me in my education. At that time I felt worried. I was afraid that I would be unable to finish my study, not because it was hard, but because I was nervous that it would become unaffordable by my parents as the expense had increased. However, I just

had to be studious and in the mean time postponed dealing with other things. I did not mind going without food from time to time. It didn't matter if my stomach was full or empty. I just had to put up with it. I lived on temple food from time to time, especially when I returned from the university late at night, and there was nothing to eat. My younger brother, who was staying at a temple, kept some food for me. He was studying at a Technical College in Nonthaburi and was staying at Lum Khongkharam Temple next to Bang Kruoy Educational Welfare School. Some of the food was kept from morning to late evening so it went off. By the time I came back, it was nine o'clock at night. I had to pick the food that could be eaten just to quell my hunger. In the final year of my study, I moved to a rented house which I shared with my elder sister who was studying at Suan Dusit Teachers College. My elder sister, three of my younger siblings, and myself, were all studying. Our parents had a big burden to support us. I decided to borrow money from Thai Kasikorn Bank educational loan, and repaid it all after two years of working. While studying, I enrolled to become a volleyball player and a hockey player. I would like to become a swimmer as well but had no time to practice. I finally completed my course at Sri Nakariniwiro Physical Education University and obtained a Bachelor of Education degree, major in Physical Education, and minor in Health Education. I was very proud of myself. My father, mother, relatives, and friends all congratulated me for my success. It was an exceptional achievement at that time as it was rare for a boat person to achieve such a high level of education. I myself never expected that I could reach this point since there were so many obstacles along the way. That's why I was very proud of my success. It may also be due to the following reasons.

1. I studied the subject I loved.
2. I paid attention to my study and was studious.
3. I put up with obstacles without complaining.
4. I was poor. This reason could not be overlooked. Being a poor student, I had to take extra care of my spending. I had to be modest and knew my place when making friends. I took care not to get into trouble as it could disrupt my study. I had to restrain myself from temptations that could lead me astray. These may have caused problems. Therefore, I had to be extremely patient and keep my mind in full control. I had to endure hardship as well as restraining myself. **There is a positive side to study when one is in a state of scarcity. Scarcity helps to restrain one's mind from craving for unnecessary things in life. If one has everything at one's disposal, being very comfortable, one may lose oneself in the luxury of comfort. One's mind may be let loose; it may "go astray". One may not have completed one's study. Come to think of it, one feels thankful to poverty. It is one of many forces behind one's achievement in education.**

My father revealed to me that when sending money to me, he would sometimes send it in two batches. For example, if it was 800 baht, he would send 500 first, followed by 300 baht later. When I asked for money, he would sometimes tell me to wait a minute saying that he would ask my mother to borrow it from our neighbors and repaid them later. The reason he said this to me was to make me appreciate the value of money so that I would not be extravagant, and be economical. My father used this unique trick to teach his children to be economical.

In 1977, it was time to start work. I intended to teach in a physical education college as it was my direct line of work. However, there were only seven physical education colleges throughout the country at that time, unlike nowadays. I consulted Mr. Paitoon Jaisin, a lecturer who taught me at Mahasarakham Physical Education College, and Sri Nakarinwirot Physical Education University. He kindly advised me to take an exam to become a teacher in civil service at Ang Thong Physical Education College because it was not very far away.

On the day the results were announced at the Department of Physical Education, I went there very early, even before the list of names was put up. It turned out that I came first. As I was leaving the Department of Physical Education, I felt as if I was walking on air. I didn't even realise when I reached the front gate. To be certain, I went back three times to check the results. This was another achievement which I never imagined would be possible.

I pictured myself in a uniform carrying out my duties as a teacher. It made me feel so proud that I had finally found happiness in my life. I decided that from now on I would carry out my duty to the best of my ability. I would listen to my superiors, and would not argue. I would just work hard so that I could be promoted to a higher position in the civil service. Once I had money, I would have a house built for my father and mother. They would be able to leave their boat and come to live peacefully in their old age. I would support my younger siblings in their education. After that I would become ordained to be a monk, and later I would get married and have a family of my own. My life would be happy ever after. Those were my dreams at that time.

Mr. Thawee Saengma, Ms. Srimuang Srisuwan, Mr. Sakol Kamnoetsiri, and Mr. Paitoon Jaisin, were the teachers I mentioned earlier. They all had been very kind to me and I shall never forget. Today I still think of their kindness and the support they gave to me.

The Accident

In the third year of my career as a civil servant, I was exactly 24 years old. My life seemed to be going well the way I wanted it to be. My parents were making preparations for me to become ordained as a monk. Invitation cards were sent to our relatives. My parents warned me, **'Before becoming ordained as a monk, Thai men usually experience Mara.³ Do not go anywhere, or do anything wrong. Concentrate on doing good things.'** I was heedful and always kept their words in my mind.

On 3 April 1979, only 20 days before I was due to be ordained, I was travelling into Ang Thong town centre with my friend on his motorbike. I was the passenger sitting behind him. Before emerging onto the main road, a big truck was cutting right in front of us. I said to my friend that it was all right, that there would not be any accident because we were careful. My friend who was riding the motorbike said safety came first; or else we would be leading a life of sitting, lying, and eating. His words did not make an impression on me at that moment because I was thinking to myself that we would surely not end up like that. We went into Ang Thong town centre. While passing Ang Thong Hospital, I saw a person in a wheelchair pushed by another person. I thought to myself how this was referred to as a state of sitting, lying, and eating, and that I would not end up like that because my life was going well. I forgot that what I saw might have been a message from a divine messenger reminding me to live my life heedfully.

I returned to the college that afternoon to teach volleyball. In the evening a friend of mine asked whether I would like to go out with him so that we could enjoy ourselves like other youngsters. I was thinking of my father's words of advice and thought this could lead to all sorts of mischief, so I declined his offer. That evening I went out to help my friend to teach swimming to twilight students instead. I was demonstrating how to dive. The first and the second dives went well. But on the third occasion, it might have been due to lacking awareness or not being careful enough, I made an error. I was diving into the pool. When my head reached the surface of the water, instead of pushing my head up so that my entire body would be parallel to the surface of the water, my head went straight to the bottom of the pool and that was the cause of this accident. My whole body suddenly went numb. I could not move but was still conscious. I knew I was at the bottom of the pool. I was trying to get help from students who were swimming nearby by blowing bubbles and widening my eyes to signal I was in a big trouble and needed help, but was unsuccessful. At that time I was fully conscious but did not know what had happened to me. I thought my life would probably come to an end. I was thinking of my parents and how aggrieved they would become had they learned that my life had ended like this. I began to use a tactic to prolong my life, a technique employed by boatpeople when drowning or diving, that is to gradually swallow water into the body until losing consciousness.

³ In Buddhist Texts, 'Mara' often appears as the personification of the passions and unwholesome states. The word also represents the totality of worldly existence and suffering, as well as death. Mara symbolizes the things which oppose enlightenment.

At that moment, a student was swimming by. His legs happened to touch my body so he realized I was drowning and helped me out of the pool. I became conscious again, feeling as if my body was pushed to the left and the right. I opened my eyes and saw a big strong man in swimming trunks. I thought he was the God of Death. But when I became conscious again, I learned that it was the student who had helped me out of the pool. I tried to utter a word but failed. He asked how I was. I just shook my head to signal, "It's very bad." Many people thought I was pretending as there was no sign of any wound on my body. After that I was taken to hospital.

Physical and Mental Suffering

After the accident, I went into Central Hospital, Bangkok, for treatment. I lost sensation throughout the whole body. I was unable to move but was reasonably conscious. Following a physical examination, the doctor at Central Hospital found that my fifth neck bone was broken. This affected the central nervous system and caused my whole body to be paralyzed, and without sensation. I could only lie still, and was immobile. The doctor was unable to cure me. I was to remain disabled like this for the rest of my life. I went through an operation during which the doctor took a piece of bone from my left pelvis to mend my broken neck bone. This seemed to improve my condition a little. I was able to start moving both of my arms despite them remaining very weak. My fingers were all useless. I went through physiotherapy to enable me to use both arms more skillfully. I felt discouraged at the beginning because I had no energy and did not feel like doing it. I was wondering when I would be able to walk if the focus was only on my arms. I was unable to move either leg. What the doctor could do was to just move them so that the joints did not get stuck. I was in hospital for four months. I was able to start moving my right arm but the left one was still weak. I was unable to control my bladder and bowel movements. The doctor was of an opinion that I would not be normal again. There was nothing more they could do to help me. I was discharged from the hospital to carry out physiotherapy at home by myself.

During that period I always thought what had happened to me was unreal and just a nightmare. It was just a dream and soon I would wake up and the nightmare would disappear. I did not really believe that it was true. What I felt at that time was not clear; it was dull and blurry as if I was semi-conscious. When I was sleeping, I usually dreamed that I was going about doing things as normal without any problem. But when I woke up, I found that I was disabled and immobile. I could not go anywhere. I sometimes felt puzzled and wondered which part of my life was real. Was it when I was sleeping or when I was awake? My life suddenly changed like flipping one's hand, so I was unable to adjust myself. It took many months before I could adjust myself to the whole situation.

The disability I am experiencing at present consists of weak arms, useless fingers, useless legs. Also from the neck to the tip of my toes, there was little sensation and sometimes no sensation at all, that is I won't feel any pain if someone stabs me with a needle. My whole body is numb. I am unable to control my bladder or bowel movements. I cannot do anything for myself. Most of my time is spent in bed. Occasionally someone will carry me down and put me to sit up in a wheelchair. I cannot sit for a long time because I will feel uncomfortable and cannot breathe properly. Bedsores may develop around the area of my back and bottom due to lying in one position too long.

After leaving Central Hospital, I went to stay temporarily at Ang Thong Physical Education College because I did not have a house at that time. My parents earned their living on a boat; they lived on the boat so I did not have a proper home. As I had become disabled, my mother had to look after me, leaving my father to work on his own. I count myself lucky to have my parents' support; otherwise, it would have been more difficult and painful for me. I stayed at Ang Thong Physical Education College for less than ten days. My mother could not stand seeing me in such a state so she made every attempt to

find good physicians and medication to cure me. She took me everywhere; we tried many good physicians and types of medication. We would be staying at a physician's house for a period of time, sometimes for as long as seven to eight months. I was taken for treatments to many places, lots of money had been spent, but my condition did not improve. During that period I had to resign from the civil service because I could no longer carry out my duties. At that point, I thought, "having to resign from work means I don't have a future any more."

Seeking Inner Refuge

I felt very regretful after having to resign from the civil service job. I always pondered on my life from past to present, and found that at that moment I had a lot of suffering. I felt lost and depressed, and kept asking myself why I was so unlucky. My life had been going well so far and it was getting better. I completed my education and had a secure job. Why everything had to fall apart and I became disabled who could not take care of myself. Even relieving my bladder and bowels was out of my control and I could not even bathe myself. I did not want to be in this state, having to sit in a wheelchair, and being permanently bedridden. **I didn't want this kind of life!!!**

I was very disappointed and didn't know what to do with myself. I experienced suffering and pain both physically and psychologically. The truth is my body hurts and I shall remain disabled for the rest of my life. I was so disappointed that my mind became increasingly overwhelmed with scattering thoughts. And when I thought too much, I felt like wanting to be a mad man, to become insane so that I could forget everything that happened to me. At that time I felt lost and lonely as if I was born to live alone in the world. No one else was like me. I wanted to find inner refuge. Outside I had things and people I could turn to but I didn't have any refuge inside. Anyway I remained patient and did not show any sign of distress outwardly.

I was used to freedom of using my organs or body that had been functioning properly for twenty four years. I took them for granted, believing they actually belonged to me. I thought they were permanent, and would not disintegrate that easily. So when they became defective and did not function properly, I was regretful and upset. I felt irritated and worried, thinking that I would no longer be able to do anything. Everything was disintegrating and coming to an end. My confidence also deteriorated. However, there was a thought of consolation telling me to be patient a little longer as my life might not last that long, having such a defective body unlike others. The longest I could live would be less than five years if there were no other complications to cut short my life before then. Or I would definitely become neurotic because of my excessive thoughts. It was the consolation that set the deadline for my life.

I made a compromise to myself that since I would have to continue living in this state, I might as well make the best of it. I therefore asked myself how I could make my life worthwhile and useful to myself and others, and how I could make the best use of my disability. If I just let my life drift away without any meaning, I would be in anguish and pain for the rest of my life. It became very crucial that I had to do something. So far my life seemed to be of no substance. However, I could not figure out what to do at that moment.

My parents and relatives had been supporting and encouraging me all along. I saw this as a good and important environment as I was not put under pressure psychologically. It's one of the reasons why my mental health has been fine until now. It is a good example for people who have duties to look after patients. If carers are kind and loving, patients' mental state will also be healthy.

Because of pain and suffering I experienced for which I had no way out, I fell into despair and wished to have refuge that I could internally turn to. My parents and relatives are outside factors I can depend on, but I wanted to find a way to end the suffering myself. As it turned out, suffering has helped to instill my faith in Buddhism. I therefore would like to advise people who find themselves with problems and suffering with no way out, not to rush into any decision. They should consult their good friends so a solution or a way to end such problems or suffering can be pointed out.

Disappointment
Lack of confidence

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for twenty four years.
I took them for granted,
believing they actually belonged to me.
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So when they became defective
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thinking that I would no longer be able to do anything.
Everything was disintegrating and coming to an end.
My confidence also deteriorated.

Finding

A path to be free from suffering

Mother is my first teacher of Kammatṭhāna.
She made me realise that
as I intended to be ordained as a novice or a monk
but missed the opportunity,
I might as well turn to the study of the Dhamma
by reading books, or listening to tapes provided by my father.
This will be of benefit to me before I die,
in case some merits and good deeds will be with me after death.
It will be better than letting my mind wander
aimlessly without any meaning,
which is a waste of time.
So I tried to concentrate my mind
and focus on matters of Dhamma only.

Dhamma Practice
Searching

To develop self-awareness through physical movements.
It is a short cut practice,
with no rituals involved,
and you need not shut your eyes.
The focus is on total awareness of your bodily movements.
Thoughts are to be observed,
not suppressed nor indulged in.
He usually challenged us to practice,
saying that if we followed his advice,
our suffering would diminish.

Obstacles ...
To overcome ...

Thoughts wandering into the past and the future
are like the same old visitors
that usually come along to deceive our mind.
If we are not up to their games,
they will come very often.
In the past, we were led astray by them.
They always came in to invite us to conspire with them.
They tried to distract our mind to take a journey with them.
Whenever we followed them,
our mind struggled,
it became worn out, restless, and imbalanced.
Thoughts in our mind give rise
to birth and existence of whatever we're thinking.

Beginning of Dhamma Study

During that time, my parents experienced suffering as much as I did. They pinned their hope on me and I disappointed them. Every child's father and mother normally want to see their child having a bright future and a good life. I turned out to be the opposite to what they wished for. That's why they suffered so much pain; they were also seeking a way to free themselves from suffering. My father was looking for a means to end suffering by going to various temples and monasteries where the Dhamma and meditation sessions were being taught. Each time he came back from these sessions, he would bring to us Dhamma books and tapes or tell us the method of mental training at the place he had been to. He never failed to do so every time he came back from those temples or monasteries.

At the beginning I was not very interested in the Dhamma but my mother who already had faith in this matter was very keen. Before this my mother usually advised me to think of the Buddha's virtue and to mentally recite, "Bud" when breathing in, and "Dho" when breathing out. She said this would help me recover from illness. She also chanted and prayed loving kindness for me every day. Mother is my first teacher of Kammaṭṭhāna⁴. She made me realize that as I intended to be ordained as a novice or a monk but missed the opportunity, I might as well turn to the study of the Dhamma by reading books, or listening to tapes provided by my father. This will be of benefit to me before I die, in case some merits and good deeds will be with me after death. It will be better than letting my mind wander aimlessly without any meaning, which is a waste of time. So I tried to concentrate my mind and focus on matters of the Dhamma⁵ only.

From then on I started reading and listening to the Dhamma every day. As days went by I became absorbed and found pleasure in the Dhamma and this temporarily helped me forget my pain and suffering. At the time of reading or listening to the Dhamma, I felt better, and experienced lots of good feelings inside. The mind became kinder and more charitable and I started to enjoy the Dhamma. I would pay special attention to any conversation concerning the Dhamma. Reading Dhamma books is in a way good for us. We have been reading text books or newspapers and this sometimes brings us a headache, dizziness, or stress. Reading about and learning the Dhamma is the opposite. It frees our minds from all stress and worries. The Dhamma is all about our real life, about ourselves. Through the Dhamma we learn about suffering, unsatisfactoriness, the path leading to the cessation of suffering, and the cessation of suffering. We begin to understand the teaching of the Buddha. However, at that time I did not think of practicing meditation because I mistakenly believed that a disabled person like me would not be able to do any mental training as I spent most of my time in bed. I could neither sit nor walk meditation. So I thought it was impossible for me to practice.

⁴ 'kammaṭṭhāna' means 'stations of mental exercises' to develop tranquility and insight

⁵ The 'Dhamma' is the Buddha's teaching. It can also refer to nature, the law of nature, the duty that must be performed according to that law of nature, and the fruits or benefits that arise from the performance of that duty.

Having said that I did try practicing to a certain extent but not seriously since there was no teacher to guide me. I adopted the ‘Buddho’ method and practiced in the reclining posture with my eyes closed. Breathing in with “Bud” and breathing out with “Dho” did calm my mind after a while. But once my mind was calm, I fell asleep. Suffering disappeared while I was asleep, but when I woke up, I still suffered just like before. This is because disability is still with me, and there is still the “I” who assumes the role as a disabled person. My mind still wandered and was unhappy. And whenever I did ‘Buddho’ meditation, I fell asleep. I even wondered whether Kammatṭhāna was designed to make people fall asleep; or whether we can free ourselves from suffering only when we slept. But that’s not the case. When I became irritated, worried, and got very stressful, I tried to induce my mind to be calm and concentrated, by chanting Buddho with every inhalation and exhalation, but my mind refused to calm down. Sometimes I became discouraged and fed up with the practice because I did not learn anything. I felt it’s better to read books; at least I learned something about the Dhamma.

Not that Buddho meditation practice is no good. It’s more to do with the state of my physical condition and posture, which is not suitable for this kind of method. Or one can say that it does not suit my temperament. In doing mental training, one needs a good and peaceful environment as well as good friends, such as teachers, who can give advice on how to do it properly so that one will not get lost or go astray. So what I could do at the time was just to continue reading and listening to the Dhamma.

While concentrating on reading, listening to, and contemplating the Dhamma, I sometimes felt as if I had attained Nibbāna or enlightenment, and was liberated from suffering. At that particular moment, my mind was completely free from suffering. What I experienced was joy and happiness. I always reflected on my favorite subjects of the Dhamma, and even put it down in my notebook, which was the reason for me to start learning to write again. **If one could attain enlightenment and free oneself from suffering merely by reading, listening to, and contemplating the Dhamma, without actually having to do any mental training according to the Lord Buddha’s teaching, I would have already attained Nibbāna, and ended my suffering a long time ago. But as it was, my mind still wandered when I was not reading or listening to the Dhamma. The ‘I’, as a disabled person, was still there, and remained ‘a sufferer’. This happens because one has never actually been reflectively aware of the suffering within oneself despite the desire to get away from it. It is like a person wishing to run away from a snake, but does not even know its nature or appearance. He may run away only to tread on it and be bitten by it. The Buddha said, “One should be reflectively aware of suffering”.** I wanted to practice meditation, but did not yet know how to start.

The Cessation of Suffering through the Practice of Dhamma

After that I began to look at myself again and found that my mind was still full of suffering and anxiety. Despite having read and listened to the Dhamma to a great extent, my mind was not completely free from suffering. It had been sixteen years since my father kept on piling Dhamma books and tapes on me until our bookshelves were full. And it wouldn't be long before the whole house was full with no space to sleep. However, the suffering in my mind remained. It could have been because I did not do any practice. **In the books, it is always advised that we train our mind to develop insight within ourselves. It's not good enough just to read and listen to the Dhamma. We have to start practicing. It's the same as looking at a map inside the house without starting our journey. We will end up going round in circles inside the house without reaching any destination.** This reflection inspired me to start doing mental cultivation practice, but I did not know how to begin. Despite having some understanding from the study of the Dhamma, I had little self-confidence to practice. At that moment, I wished I had a good friend, a teacher, who could give me advice. I would have liked to have come across a Kammatthāna practitioner and also to have become one myself. I thought this could only be a wish as it would have been impossible for a person in my condition to practice meditation. I was disabled and could not move as freely as other people so I thought I would probably just end up staying in the house.

Luang Por⁶ Khamkhian Suwanno
(My Teacher)

Around 1982, my father went to Sanam Nai Monastery to practice dynamic meditation with Luang Por Teean Chittasupho, and brought back to me books and tapes about the method of practice under Luang Por Teean Cittasubho. Luang Por Teean's line of practice is **to develop self-awareness through physical movements. It is a short cut practice, with no rituals involved, and you need not shut your eyes. The focus is on total awareness of your bodily movements. Thoughts are to be observed, not suppressed nor indulged in. He usually challenged us to practice, saying that if we followed his advice, our suffering would diminish.** I was keen to try out this practice as it can be done even when one is in a lying posture. One just has to be aware of one's thoughts which could be done while lying down. Walking and sitting meditation is not necessary. So I tried practicing while lying down. To achieve the result as quickly as possible, I began concentrating on observing thoughts straight away.

But I did not have any basis on which to practice properly. Neither did I have enough clear comprehension, so I made mistakes from the beginning. Instead of observing thoughts, I ended up indulging in them and got totally lost in those thoughts all day long. I was not aware of anything. It was because my approach was not correct. I could see then that it would be impossible for me to achieve anything if I carried on without any teacher. But who would be able to help me?

By 1985, my father became too old to work on the boat by himself. He decided to sell the boat and used the proceeds to build a house. He also turned to work in agriculture at Tambon Yang Khao, Phayuha Khiri District, Nakhon Sawan Province. These changes were brought about because my father did not have anyone to help him to work on the boat and also he wanted to be closer to his family. At that time he became a member of the Dhamma Study and Practice Group led by Mr. Wuthichai Thaweeksakiripol. Ms. Monvipa Kiatloertdham was doing administration work for the Group at that time. I took the opportunity to write to Ms. Monvipa about the Dhamma books and tapes of Luang Por Teean Cittasubho and Luang Por Khamkhian Suwanno for me to study in support of my practice to develop awareness at home. Ms. Monvipa kindly gave me the advice, and encouraged me in my practice at home. At the end of the letter, she added that if I had any questions, I could write to Luang Por Khamkhian Suwanno, Wat Phukhao Thong, Tambon Ta Mafaiwan, Kaeng Khro District, Chaiyaphum Province. I regarded Ms. Monvipa Kiatloertdham as the person who introduced me to Luang Por Khamkhian, consequently introducing a teacher to me so that I had someone to give me guidance.

I read about Luang Por Khamkhian Suwanno before. He is a kind senior monk who loves children and nature, especially trees. His approach to the practice of Dhamma is to focus on developing awareness until it becomes part of you. He does not encourage a lot of discussion. His advice and techniques in developing awareness are mainly from his own

⁶ "Luang Por" literally means "Venerable Father", the title normally addressed to elderly monks who are highly revered by people in Thailand.

practice experience, not from books. Luang Por prefers to give examples by action. This and his equanimity made me really interested.

At the end of July, 1995, I wrote to Luang Por Khamkhian asking to become one of his disciples, and also for some advice on practice for disabled people who spent most of their time in the reclining pose. I did not expect that Luang Por would reply to my letter. About twelve days later, I received a reply from him. He kindly answered my question, the content of which can be summarized as follows.

Luang Por is happy to be a good friend and teacher to me. He will not mislead me in my practice. He introduces a method of Kammaṭṭhāna, training of the mind by being aware of one's existence in the present moment. It is possible to train one's mind even when one is lying down. This can be done by being aware of one's bodily movements, such as hands turning over, etc. When unintentional thoughts arise, do not pay attention to them; come back to the body, focus one's mind on the body. Being diligent to develop reflective awareness is called "Bhāvanā"⁷. **To develop Bhāvanā is to observe and to be aware of oneself as often as possible; it isn't just trying to calm the mind. It is to be aware of oneself constantly in the present moment. This is "Kammaṭṭhāna" or training of the mind. When one becomes increasingly aware of oneself in the present moment, delusion and misconception will diminish or disappear. Then one can investigate the truth. One will be aware of and perceive clearly the material and mental elements of one's existence⁸. Whatever is observed is to be left alone. One remains only in the state of pure observation, not as a participant. Just observe and do not identify oneself with that which is being observed. When anything arises in connection with one's body and mind, stand back and observe until one sees it through. If happiness arises, leave it alone. Simply acknowledge that there is happiness arising in the mind but do not identify with it. On the other hand, when unsatisfactoriness or suffering arises, simply observe and be aware of it, but do not identify with it or become the sufferer. Observe and be aware of any feeling of boredom, frustration, or irritation, and see it as a state of the mind. Do not become anything. Just keep on practicing.** In the letter, Luang Por also encouraged me in my endeavor. His letter was like a blessing from the Buddha. I began to feel hopeful. At last I had a teacher.

I saw this as a good sign for me at that time. My behavior started to change. It marked the beginning of my new life. Normally, I spent my time each day thinking of the past and the future. I was travelling on a dark painful path of suffering. But **Luang Por came along and changed my behavior. He helped me to live in the present moment, to concentrate on my bodily movements and the thinking of the mind. This is the mental training in which one simply observes and is aware of oneself in the present moment. It is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. It is a bright path. Beginning this was a pivotal moment in my life.** Luang Por introduced me to walk on a

⁷ " Bhāvanā" in Buddhist term means "growth; cultivation; training; development of wisdom".

⁸ In Buddhist terms, the 'mental and material elements of one's existence' are defined as the "Five Aggregates". They consist: 1. Corporeality - one's body; more specifically the four primary elements: earth, water, fire and wind, 2. Feeling, 3. Perception, 4. Mental formations, and 5. Consciousness. Corporeality comprises the material group of existence whereas the remaining four groups are mental.

bright path so I became very confident. Before this I thought it was impossible. But later, my attitude changed to “I can do it. I can do it.” When I felt that I could do it, it became possible. I felt encouraged and the confidence I once lost had returned. I now believe in the cessation of suffering. I am convinced that there is a possibility for me to be free from suffering. I believe in this approach. I am convinced that if I train my mind accordingly, I will definitely have a chance to end my suffering. This approach is correct in accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness I learned about. I also have trust in my teacher; I trust that he will not lead me astray.

Initial Phase of Kammatṭhāna Practice

I came across a lot of obstacles during my initial attempt to develop self-awareness at home. I had to really focus my mind on the practice, which is to go against the flow of one's thoughts. One's mind has a tendency to get stuck in the groove of old patterns or habits. I had to find a way to become aware of my physical movements in the present moment, and to be aware of the body for as long as possible. I had to force myself a lot to do this. There were also many emotions troubling my mind. Sometimes I had to ignore them. I chose to practice in a quiet moment, to find a peaceful corner for myself. Any conversation, sounds from radio, television, or any bustling going on nearby usually disturbed my concentration. There were three people in the house; my father, my mother, and myself. Around 8 o'clock after breakfast, my parents would go to work in the garden and I would be left alone in the house. I would start doing my mental work developing my awareness. I was in the room with the clock ticking to a rhythm of each turning over of my hand to develop awareness. The ticking sound of the clock was useful to the developing of awareness. While developing awareness by moving hand together with the ticking sound of the clock, if I became unaware or absent-minded or indulging myself in emotions and not being in the present moment, the ticking sound of the clock would bring back my mind from distractions, to be grounded on Kammatṭhāna practice.

I started my practice while lying on my back, concentrating on being aware of each turning of the hand. I first started with my right hand only; my left hand was not strong so I could not control it properly. But after practicing for a long time with the right hand, it became tired and weak because it had been used for too long. I had to persevere until I got used to this, consequently the right hand became stronger. By the time I went to bed, my right hand was very painful. Sometimes I didn't know where to put the hand, and so kept it standing on its edge until I fell asleep. Initially there were lots of thoughts with little awareness. I had some joy, and sometimes compared my experiences with the text. Sometimes my mind struggled to get rid of suffering as quickly as possible. Those were thoughts that distracted my mind from the present moment. They dragged me away from the foundations of awareness and wasted a lot of my time. That was my initial phase of the training of my mind. I repeatedly failed but got up to start it all over again.

Despite the way it was going, I did not feel discouraged. I could not afford to be discouraged; otherwise, I would go back to the same old misery. So I continued practicing against all the odds, against all the failures to establish mindfulness. In the first seven days, I didn't seem to achieve anything other than to experience thoughts overwhelming awareness.

I started it again later on. But this time I reviewed Luang Por's approach of mind training before the practice. **Luang Por told us to observe our physical movements only, but so far I had been carried away with thoughts and did not focus on the body. I failed to adhere to the principle of observing the body. Kammatṭhāna was therefore not Kammatṭhāna. So I made up my mind to start again. This time I would not pay any attention to thoughts. Whatever the text or the teacher said, I would leave it alone for the moment. I would not bring along the text to my practice. The bodily**

movements would become my only main focus of awareness. Thoughts would be ignored. Some physical pains, boredom, sleepiness, doubts, and all other petty thoughts did arise but I had already made up my mind that once they arose, they would be discarded. Grasping them is not the path to the cessation of suffering. I would not walk on that path, and would not place value on any of them. Once we stop placing value on them, when they arise, they become nothing to us. We will aim directly to being mindful of our physical movements. This is our way. I would focus only on this without paying attention to other things. I would overlook them first and would just follow Luang Por's advice.

Once awareness becomes established with the movements of the body, they become connected and are always together. The more awareness there is, the less thoughts there are. Observation of bodily movements becomes distinctly clear. **This is not a visual observation but an observation of the mind by actually being aware of one's physical movements. When one becomes deeply aware or mindful of one's physical movements, such awareness becomes heightened. The "Knowing" inside has been established. I experienced this and so was living in the present moment. I knew then how to practice Kammaṭṭhāna and have enjoyed developing mindfulness ever since.**

I enjoyed each passing day developing my awareness. At the beginning, I only used my right hand so it became tired and weak. Later I tried using my left hand but struggled at first because it was not strong. But once I began using it, it became stronger. I practically developed awareness as well as doing physiology at the same time. My body and mind were trained simultaneously. I tried to think of new postures so that I could practice for longer without getting bored. Any part of the body which was not disabled hardly disabled, or moveable to some extent, became my tool for developing awareness. Sometimes, I became weary after a long period of practice, so I would turn to small physical movements. They would be done lightly, being mainly on my face, as it was better than any other part. I would do things like turning my face, tilting my head to left and right, raising my eyebrows, twitching my nose, my mouth, or my ears.

I developed quite a lot of awareness each day by using these small gestures because disabled people are very restricted in their physical movements. When sleepiness, thoughts, or strong emotions came in and affected the mind, my strategy was to move parts of my body faster and more forcefully to keep my mind alert. Sometimes I intentionally made a movement to wake myself up and heighten my awareness. I kept on developing mindfulness to make it become established in the body, enabling it to follow one's body as the first foundation. I tried focusing on this point first without paying any attention to thoughts or feelings. But if thoughts or feelings arose, I would be aware of them. If correction or involvement was required, for example with physical pain, this would be done with awareness, then I would quickly return to being mindful of the body. It doesn't matter if one has not yet learned anything. Just being aware to establish a firm foundation first.

Sometimes a peaceful feeling arose and one became so peaceful that one became attached to it and enjoyed it. The mind was so peaceful that it did not want to know anything else. At that moment, awareness disappeared, it was not with the body; it deserted the body to be with tranquility. The body also stopped moving because it fell into the spell of calmness. When I became aware of this, I quickly returned to concentrating my mind on the body. I carried out the practice like this every day.

I lived my life in the present moment without thinking of the past or the future. My mind became happier. I enjoyed developing awareness. It is better than reading and listening to the Dhamma because one's mind actually experiences reality and real Dhamma. It is like the word "Sandiṭṭhiko" in the Virtues of the Dhamma chanting, which means Dhamma "shall be seen by the wise for themselves".

Inner Change

During my practice, I sometimes had doubts and wanted to write to ask Luang Por. But then I thought it would take many days before I received a reply from him. I decided not to write. After keeping on practicing, I sometimes got the answer myself. I had been developing awareness for about one month, when one day something changed inside. I was developing awareness until it became so forceful that it got deeply established in the body. It became integral to and moved along in unity with the body. This caused fatigue and pressure around my head. I experienced this symptom for quite some time. My practice of Kammaṭṭhāna was not as comfortable as it used to be. I therefore started again by keeping my awareness firmly fixed at one point without following the bodily movements. I just remained with awareness at that one point, and began to feel as if my mind was detaching itself or stepping back to observe my physical movements. I realized then that the mind or awareness is actually the same entity. Its duty is to acknowledge or to be conscious of objects. The body is the moving part and is driven by the mind. I saw that the body and the mind are separate entities. The body is the body and the mind is the mind. They have different functions. I also saw that disability is integral to the body. At this point, I saw that disability is actually part of the body and the mind is just simply conscious of it. This realization instantly made me feel liberated and light. It was as if I had found a new place of my own, not in the disabled body any more. I had pulled myself away, I had detached myself from it, I was at one with awareness, simply observing the body. A comparison can be made to a situation when I was once trying to open a tiger balm box but failed. But then one day I was able to hold it properly and successfully took it apart into two parts. This is the same. The truth is when one's awareness becomes increasingly established, one will gain insight into the nature and characteristics of the body and the mind. One will be able to perceive clearly that they are not a single entity and that they perform different functions.

At this stage, it was necessary to write to ask Luang Por again because I needed a teacher to guide me. It was a crucial moment as I could either go the right way or the wrong way. I wrote to Luang Por describing what happened in my practice. I asked whether I was doing the right thing at this stage, and what next step I should be doing. Luang Por kindly wrote back that I was doing things correctly. The next step was for me to observe rupa nama (body-mind), and suffering and disease borne out of them. I was advised to just observe their conditions or symptoms. Luang Por emphasized, "Just keep on making pure observation. Don't dwell on them or identify with them". You will increasingly gain wisdom. However, Luang Por had been abroad so it took a long time before this letter came to me.

I continued developing awareness through physical movements. There were still some thoughts arising with awareness like waves troubling the mind. These were usually reasoning thoughts, trying to explain the phenomena borne out of the practice. As a matter of fact, awareness, thoughts, and mind are abstract entities, whereas the moving body is concrete. I was unable to observe thoughts arising that clearly. Whatever kind of thought will defile the mind, preventing it from being pure. I therefore wanted to separate thoughts from the mind so that only the pure mind remained. Before starting, I decided to keep my awareness in the middle while directing my attention to my right hand moving

and turning. The body was used as the base to be aware of when there were no thoughts arising. When any kind of thoughts arose, good, bad, happy, or unhappy, the attention would be directed to the left hand side. Each time any thought arose, it was observed and let go of, then the attention returned to the body on the right hand side while being aware in the middle. I wanted my awareness to be firmly established so that my mind would not attach to the body or get lost in thoughts. At the beginning there were no thoughts as they were carefully monitored and so suppressed. And when the attention was too focused on the body, any thought arising escaped from my observation. The thoughts were very fast. Sometimes I forgot to be aware of the body, and got lost in thoughts. But when I became aware, thoughts would automatically be let go of and the attention returned to the body. I carried on doing this until at last my awareness became increasingly sharp. I became distinctly aware of the body and thoughts, especially thoughts. Awareness became the master. Even with a small physical movement, thoughts would automatically vanish and the attention instantly returned to the body. I practiced like this until I became skilful; my mind was sharper, more alert and simply aware. **At this point, I realized that I was walking on the middle path; a non-dualistic path. The path where the mind does not dwell in the moving body or get lost in happy, satisfactory, or unhappy, unsatisfactory thoughts. It is in the state of normality. I realized I had found the way to lead me out of suffering. I only have to be fully aware of any phenomenon without judgment, that's all. It's here. It's the safe position, the basis of one's life. The reins of Dhamma controlling one's life are right here. At last I have found my inner refuge. I became highly appreciative of the advantage of awareness. I thought if I persevered in developing my awareness, it would become increasingly established, and would definitely be like a vehicle taking me out of suffering.**

A comparison can be made to a person who has been trapped in a dark cave for a long time and is looking for a way to get out of the cave but cannot find it. He happens to glimpse a ray of light shining into the cave in the distance. He instantly realizes that this must surely be the way to get out of the cave. He therefore tries hard to get out of the cave as quickly as possible.

I placed value on awareness much more than anything, so I thought of leaving home to practice in a quiet and peaceful place. I wanted to be close to teachers, so that I could achieve the result as soon as possible. Had a disabled person been permitted to be ordained as a monk, I would have done so long time ago. I always thought like that because I had found my way out. I found the way to escape from suffering, and started to see the essence of life. My behavior also began to change. **I carried on developing awareness, observing bodily movements, and following the same basis. But this time I was diligent in my practice. I tried to be continuously aware in whatever activity or situation. I would keep on doing this all day long, except when I slept. The exercise became harder for me because I practiced at home. But however difficult it was, I had to do it because the stake was high. I could be free from suffering.**

The practice started from when I first opened my eyes at four o'clock in the morning. I instantly became aware of myself and intentionally focused my attention to be aware of all my actions all day long. Sometimes I forgot but then tried to become aware of the body or the mind again. This usually happened especially when I was talking so I did not

want to talk to anyone as it distracted me from the present moment. However, I usually talked to myself, reminding myself to be aware. My daily practice involved turning myself over, folding my blanket, cleaning my teeth, drinking water, eating, cleaning myself, relieving my bladder and bowels, pushing my wheelchair, etc. I tried to be continuously aware in whatever activity I found myself. **I realize that true wisdom can be gained only when we are continuously mindful of every action we carry out. This wisdom comes from mind training and the development of awareness, not from reasoning or logical thinking.**

I would be practicing like this until about nine o'clock at night. Then I slept. But I would not sleep during the day time. I stopped paying attention to things outside. I stopped watching television or listening to radio. If I listened to the radio, it would only be about the Dhamma. I did not read any books other than Dhamma books. And I occasionally listened to the Dhamma as it kept me good company at the time when I was far away from the teacher. It also brought me a change of atmosphere. I talked only as necessary and did not indulge myself in talking about foolish things because they would lead my mind astray. I no longer amused myself with nonsensical things, such as taking pleasure in forms, sounds, smells, tastes, contacts, and thinking because they would lead me out of the path, delay me, and waste my time. **I had been persevering to develop and increase my awareness. If I indulged myself in these things, it would be as if I had allowed thieves to come in to rob my awareness. I had to keep reminding myself of this. Whatever happened, inside or outside, I would try to bring myself back to awareness, to come to this point.**

Observing Body and Mental Activity

I practiced with the greatest care every day to accumulate and increase awareness. I became mentally alert and sharply aware of objects in contact without being distracted by them. The mind became neutral and particularly aware of the state of the body and mental activity. When I focused my attention to observe the body and the mind, I could see phenomena arising from them clearly. The state of the body: for example physical pain, is not the body. However, it is borne out of and separate from the body. It is the “state or condition” inherently hidden in one’s body. **Since I was born until I am now in my forties, throughout those long years I have depended on this body but never seriously observed it. Once I began to focus my attention on it, what I saw was only suffering and unsatisfactoriness. The body is full of disease, unpleasant and unsightly matter. The nature of the body, in my view, is a process of relieving suffering and discomfort from birth till death. Suffering exerting on us has to be continuously relieved. What we can do is to relieve it as it arises, with a balanced mind that does not suffer with the body.** In a situation when one is unable to relieve physical suffering or discomfort, one should simply be aware of it. A disabled person like me, in particular, has a lot of physical pains to observe. This is because one’s positions, sitting, standing, lying, etc., are not in balance. Consequently, one ends up as if having a double pain.

Doctors and nurses advised me not to lie on my back too long as I might develop bed sores on my back and bottom. I was told to change the position from lying on my back to lying on my side, and vice versa. That’s all I can do. I can neither sit properly nor unaided. I can only sit on a wheelchair designed for disabled people only. **Having restricted positions, I was able to perceive clearly the pain and suffering being played up by the body.** This was particularly evident when I was unable to relieve pain and suffering by myself and had to wait for others to help me. On such occasions, suffering could be seen very clearly. As I developed awareness by moving a part of my body while remaining in a particular position for some time also caused physical pain. Tiredness and weakness arose while in that particular position, so I had to change to a new position to relieve that suffering. Changing positions to relieve physical pain and suffering has to be done continually until we die.

It is evident that the body regularly displays its nature of impermanence, suffering, and not-self, and that it is not under anyone’s control. When we first get up, we have to start relieving our body from discomforts. We have to drink water, wash our face, clean our teeth, eat, go to the toilet, have a shower, and keep changing our positions. We have to keep on doing all these until it’s time to go to bed. We cannot afford not to do it. We have to relieve these sufferings exerted on us. Sometimes we are unable to relieve them ourselves, so we rely on others to help us. My body is particularly defective. The nerve cells receiving sensations were so severely damaged that my whole body lost the sensation and became paralyzed. The doctor is unable to help me. This kind of suffering cannot be relieved. I can only be aware of it. There is no need to relieve it because it is impossible. Also because of limited physical movements; hence lack of exercise, other complications set in, such as stomach ulcers, digestive problems, circulation problems, respiratory disorders, etc.

Once we realize the true nature of the body, we will see that it is full of the three common characteristics, i.e. impermanence, suffering or unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The body does not last forever; it will soon deteriorate and fall apart. We don't want our body to be like that but it does not listen to anyone. It only follows the law of nature. I have observed physical pains and diseases playing up so very often, and having lived with it all the time, I gained wisdom and insight into the nature of the body. Because of its evident defect and incapacity, I became so increasingly fed up with this body that I didn't want to be in it or attached to it. I consequently detached myself and became one with awareness, observing physical conditions without attaching to any of them. I became the one who sees a disabled body without becoming a disabled person. However, I remained dutiful in looking after my body as well as I could. I was finally safe and free from getting caught up in the state of the body. This is my way out. It is the middle path on which I become established with awareness.

There were also a lot of mental activities, deeper and more subtle than physical conditions. However, being self-aware helps one gain insight into the mental state of happiness, unhappiness, doubts, drowsiness and thinking. Mental activity is not the mind, it is merely a condition borne out of the mind itself. If we are not up to its game, we will be easily dragged into and get caught in it. Thoughts, especially unintentional or uninvited thoughts, are the number one enemy of practitioners who try to develop self-awareness. Thoughts wandering into the past and the future are like the same old visitors that usually come along to deceive our mind. If we are not up to their games, they will come very often. In the past, we were led astray by them. They always came in to invite us to conspire with them. They tried to distract our mind to take a journey with them. Whenever we followed them, our mind struggled, it became worn out, restless, and imbalanced. Thoughts in our mind give rise to birth and existence of whatever we're thinking. This is true especially to a disabled person who is bed-ridden but whose mind still functions. He will be lying there thinking, regretting about the past and worrying about the future. Sometimes he may think too much that he has a headache. He cannot sleep and almost becomes neurotic because of worries. I had suffered because of these thoughts for a long time. Only when I started to develop awareness, and actually experience its benefits, did my awareness become increasingly established and sharp. Living in the present moment enabled me to see suffering, and the danger of unintentional or uninvited thoughts.

We don't have to do anything with these uninvited thoughts. Just observe and let them go, as they are the cause of suffering. I have learned my lesson. Now I know that the only thing I have to do is to be continuously mindful and keep watch of my thoughts. I must try to be up to their games. During my practice, while focusing on the body, unintentional thoughts usually appear out of the blue. However, I place no value on them and pay them no attention. I just observe and let them go, and then return to my bodily movements. Those thoughts then vanish. Thoughts are also impermanent and unsatisfactory because they can neither exist forever nor are they under anyone's control. Being aware makes one realise that these thoughts are not-self. They are illusions; they are mere mental concoctions that naturally arise from time to time. As a result, the mind is not deluded to become the thinker, and has established itself firmly with awareness to observe without placing any value or paying any attention to those thoughts. Those thoughts then became

of no value and not worth adhering to. I gained so many experiences from seeing these mental concoctions that I did not indulge in them. I just let them go and came back to awareness, the safe haven of the mind. This is the middle path where the mind exists to observe physical movements. It is the fundamental basis to which I shall adhere. The body is the base from which mental activities are to be left alone and so the mind is free from them. I became experienced in the practice and my awareness became sharper and increasingly established.

The Discovery To Wisdom

This realization instantly
made me feel liberated and light.
It was as if I had found a new place of my own,
Not in the disabled body any more.
I had pulled myself away
and detached myself from it,
to be one with awareness,
to simply observe it.
A comparison can be made to a situation
When I was once trying to open a tiger balm box but failed.
But then one day I was able to hold it properly
and successfully took it apart into two parts.
This is the same.
The truth is when one's awareness
becomes increasingly established,
One will gain insight into
the nature and characteristics of the body and the mind.
One will be able to perceive clearly that
they are not a single entity and that
they perform different functions.

A New Life

I lived my life in the present moment
Without thinking of the past or the future.
My mind became happier.
I enjoyed developing awareness.
It is better than reading
And listening to the Dhamma
Because one's mind actually experiences
Reality and real Dhamma.
It is like the word "Sanditthiko"
in the Virtues of the Dhamma chanting,
which means that the Dhamma
shall be seen for oneself by the practitioner.

**Keep on
Developing Awareness**

I carried on developing awareness,
observing bodily movements,
and following the same basis.
But this time, I was diligent in my practice.
I tried to be continuously aware
in whatever activity or situation.
I would keep on doing this all day long,
except when I slept.
The exercise became harder for me
because I practiced at home.
But however difficult it was,
I had to do it
because the stake was high.
I could be free from suffering.

Free from Disability

I have observed physical pains
and diseases playing up so very often,
and having lived with it all the time,
I gained wisdom and insight
into the nature of my body.
Because of its evident defect and incapacity,
I became so increasingly fed up with this body
that I didn't want to be in it or attached to it.
I consequently stood back
and became one with awareness,
observing physical conditions
without attaching to any of them.
I became the one who sees a disabled body
without becoming a disabled person.

A Sufferer Who Becomes One Who Makes Pure Observation on Suffering

When one becomes experienced in being aware of bodily and mental activities, one's awareness increases and is heightened. Awareness becomes the master, superior to those activities or conditions. The mind remains neutral when seeing them. They no longer pose any problem or burden the mind. It's as if the mind and these conditions become used to and connected to each other but remain apart. These conditions arise naturally; it's the way they do. One's duty is to observe them. Each carries out its own duty without interfering with one another. Unlike when I first practiced, my awareness was not sharp. I was neither skilful nor experienced in my practice. I had to be careful, avoiding, or making corrections according to each situation. Now I became more sharply aware and experienced, and there was no need for that. What I had to do was to just be mindful of anything arising from the body, the mind, or contacts through ears, eyes, nose, tongue, etc., then it would be instantly observed and let go of. **Observation was made at ease, with one's mind being neutral and independent from those objects in contact as if they were outside and could not reach the mind. The mind was also centred, still, and calm while observation was taking place from my inner refuge, a new home of my life.** Developing awareness as much and as often as possible until one becomes skilful is like building and adding an extension to one's house. It becomes bigger and wider with much more space to sit and lie down in. It becomes our inner refuge, our inexhaustible noble treasure. **A comparison can be made to the bearing of an engine, which consists of outer and inner rings. We get hold of the inner ring and let the outer ring rotate. The inner ring remains static and does not follow the outer ring.** This reminded me of Luang Por Khamkhan's words, "Just make pure observation without becoming anything." It made me feel secure and confident that I was on the right track and would definitely be free from suffering.

I observed my mind and saw that as long as I kept being aware of the body and the mind in the present moment, suffering would not exist. The mind would remain neutral, at ease, and independent. This is always true when one is being aware of oneself in the present moment. In the past I heard the teachers saying, "Non-suffering is where the suffering is". I was puzzled about this and wondered how one could end suffering then and there while one was in the middle of it. I was doubtful as to how it could be possible. But at this stage of my practice, I found the answer myself. **The answer is that we suffer because we put up ourselves as a sufferer. The suffering will instantly cease when we stick to pure observation, seeing the suffering but not identifying oneself as the sufferer.** I was able to answer this for myself. Therefore, to be free from suffering, pure observation must be made. From then on, I tried to build up the strength of this observation so that it became well established. Whenever anything arose, I would then be able to see it straight away. At this point, any doubt on the Dhamma I read or heard, became clearer to me. I kept on practicing with a resolve to be attentive and to persevere in this practice until it became my profession. Other people have their professions, but it was as though I was unemployed. I decided to take up the practice of developing awareness to be my profession. I shall dedicate my life to this single practice. This is the last thing I shall do to the best of my ability. There's nothing else I need to do. For the remaining part of my life I shall dedicate myself to this practice so I can be liberated from suffering before I die.

Mystery Uncovered

After a period of practice, I gained insight into certain things that happened to my mind and body. This insight has nothing to do with seeing the light or color out of body. It is the wisdom arising from one's observation and experience inside one's mind and body. I saw the nature of the body as one thing, and the nature of the mind or the thinking as another. The nature of awareness (knowing, feeling, sensing) is also unique. The nature and characteristics of these three are different. Awareness, in particular, is neither the thinking nor the body, but needs to exist with the body. However it is separate from the body. The wisdom I gained is all about these three entities, body, mind or thinking, and awareness (knowing, feeling, sensing). Awareness perceives that the body and the mind are impermanent, not under anyone's control, and not-self. The mystery of the nature of body and mind is covered up but awareness reveals it all. Awareness uncovers and reveals to us the three characteristics of nature hidden in the body and the mind. Life is investigated by using the body and mind as text books, and awareness as the student.

One's life needs to be studied by investigating one's body and mind while one is still alive. Studying from text books will not lead you anywhere near the truth. Investigating into one's body and mind will enable one to see and understand oneself more clearly. It can transform one's life. One's old habits will change and be replaced by new ones. For example, in the past we indulged ourselves in emotions and thoughts before acting, speaking, or thinking. Emotions and thoughts bossed us around. We sometimes regretted what we had said or done. We often made mistakes from saying or doing things we shouldn't have. Our life was full of mistakes; it was not that clean and clear cut. Now life has changed and we become aware of ourselves before acting, speaking, or thinking. Thought is no longer scattered. It is intentional; it's the thinking accompanied by wisdom. Such thought is creative and useful. We will be able to think in order, and can stop thinking whenever we wish. We will not have insomnia due to excessive thoughts. We change from being controlled by life to being life's controller. No more will we let fate or destiny be our master or have power over us. Instead, we let awareness determine the course and be the author of our life. Accordingly, we are free and make very few mistakes in living our life. Now life is transparent. This can be seen as a transformation to a new life, psychologically, not physically. My body can no longer be transformed. The doctor is unable to make my disabled body normally function again. But one can be psychologically transformed. How then?

Mental Resignation From Disability

After one month at the beginning of my self-awareness practice, I became increasingly aware of myself in the present moment. This enabled me to gain insight into the nature of body and mind. I perceived clearly that the body and the mind are separate entities. The body is not the mind and the mind is not the body. They are separate yet interdependent. They jointly exist but their nature and functions are different. Since gaining that insight, my mind has resigned from the disabled body. It has detached itself from the body to be with awareness (knowing, feeling, sensing). It is therefore free from the body's condition; the disabled body is left alone. The mind only acts as the observer, sensing and knowing without being affected. It no longer carries any burden or feeling of being a disabled person. The disability is to be left with the body until the last day of my life. When this is clearly perceived, the mind is entitled to resign. I saw this as a transformation of my life. The mind has been transformed from being disabled to being in a state of normality. The mind is transformed from suffering to non-suffering. It is a psychological, not physical, transformation. "Awareness" has also helped me change, and given me a new life.

In the fifth year⁹ of my practice, I became increasingly skilful and my awareness was increasingly established. I intended to develop my awareness continuously, in every activity, throughout the day. However, this was not achieved as intended. Sometimes I was not fully aware and let my mind get carried away with emotions or thoughts. I realized then that I had not achieved any good results from my practice. I was still absent-minded but at least I became aware again sooner than before. When I first started, if I was unaware, I would feel unhappy and blame myself for quite a while. I wasted my time thinking another thought on top of others. Now if I happen to indulge myself in thoughts or emotions, once I become aware, they will be instantly let go of and I can come back to the present moment straight away. I no longer waste my time feeling sorry or blaming myself which creates double thoughts. I just let it go, let it be the past. I will start and continue being aware of the present moment again until it becomes my habit.

It is good to keep alerting oneself to become mindful over and over again. This is like shifting the mind or awareness to a new position so it becomes sharper. It is similar to replacing a pair of spectacles with new lenses. One is able to see more clearly.

Each passing day, lots of inner and outer events have come and gone, into and out of my life. If it is necessary to get involved, I will do so with awareness, and dealing with them in accordance with conventional duties. If it is not necessary to be involved, I will try to avoid them, especially any nonsense that will make me forget and become unaware of the present moment. Anything that is not for the ending of suffering will usually be overlooked or bypassed. My duty is to be aware of myself in the present moment and not to take things outside seriously. **Any emotion arising, love or hate, is there for investigation. I will make use of these emotions to develop my awareness. I see this**

⁹Year 2003

as something that helps me become more experienced, teaching me the Dhamma, and giving me wisdom. What I have to do is to investigate and examine the mind's reaction. If it is still sensitive to and affected by love and hate, it means I have not yet passed the test. This is a good self-assessment.

The Positive Side of Disability

At first I thought my disability would be an obstacle to the developing of awareness. But after my experience, it is clear to me that it does not pose any problem at all. On the contrary, it turns out to be a motivation for me to practice hard so that my mind could be quickly set free from being a disabled person. The suffering I experienced is also like a license for me to enter the path of meditation practice. If I didn't suffer, I wouldn't have been interested in the Lord Buddha's teaching. I wouldn't have felt that the Lord Buddha's teaching was necessary for me, had it not been for suffering. Suffering instigated me to have faith in the training of my mind so that I could be free from it. It is also one of the most important foundations for developing one's awareness. This is the positive side of suffering.

If during the period of developing awareness, suffering arises, either physically or psychologically, it will be instantly investigated. Investigation will be made into its nature and characteristics, its origin, and the question as to who is suffering. If I become the sufferer, I fail the test. But if I am aware and just observe the suffering, I pass the test. In actual fact, seeing suffering is to see the Dhamma, the Truth of Nature, and vice versa. The Lord Buddha said, "One should be aware of suffering". Thus suffering is there to make us gain wisdom.

Leave Thoughts Alone

Prior to and during the beginning of my practice, thoughts posed a lot of problems to me. I suffered because of those thoughts. Even though they are just illusions, the mind is strongly affected. Thoughts, especially unintentional ones, used to control my life if I got attached to and identified with them. These unintentional, uninvited thoughts arise from time to time, accompanied by desire and aversion. They are the root of our suffering. **One of the four foundations of mindfulness is to do with thoughts. Thoughts are mental concoctions and not the mind. The mind and the thoughts are separate. They are not a single entity, but exist together.** The mind is naturally independent and empty. Thoughts are like guests visiting the mind from time to time. They come and go. We just have to be attentive to our physical movements.

This awareness cultivation helps to prevent the mind from being dominated by thoughts. This can be compared to when I am sitting on this wheelchair. A passer-by will just walk past me. He will not come to sit on top of me because he can see that the wheelchair is occupied. But if anyone is approaching with the intention to sit on me, I can raise my hand or say something to stop him. The same goes with the mind. When one is aware, one's mind is protected. Thoughts can no longer take over. And if one happens to be unaware and becomes overpowered by thoughts, the mind will be alerted, lets go of thoughts and becomes fully aware again. The mind is thus free from defilements and is happy.

While training the mind, practitioners usually complain of thoughts interfering. Careful reflection on this will pose a question as to who is actually interfering. As a matter of fact, it is we who interfere with thoughts. Thoughts arise naturally because that's the way they do. We cannot stop them. Neither can we have only pleasant thoughts that we like, nor be free from unpleasant ones. We cannot tell ourselves not to think because thoughts are not under our command. A person who has no thoughts at all is a dead person. What we have to do is to be aware of our bodily movements without paying any attention to thoughts. Do this as if we were driving on a road, but on a different lane from thoughts without crossing each other's lane. The fact that we try to stop thoughts, or indulge ourselves in them is like we are interfering in both ways. That's why we suffer. Try to see it as a pay back for our own kamma. The more thoughts that arise, the better; they can be used as objects of investigation, as a foundation with which to train the mind to develop awareness. We will be able to investigate and get to know their nature and characteristics. Getting lost in thoughts, or indulging ourselves in them means we fail the test. Seeing thoughts and being able to detach the mind, to be firmly established with awareness, means we pass the test. Thoughts are there for us to gain wisdom. The Lord Buddha became enlightened, not because of tranquility meditation alone, nor due to the perception of lights and colors, but because he observed his mind and his thoughts.

Tranquility or calmness experienced during the practice can captivate us, make us lazy, and stop us from developing awareness; hence wisdom may not be developed. We may learn very little and suffering will remain. If we carry on like this and the mind does not reach a state of tranquility, we suffer. This is because tranquility by itself is impermanent.

Buddhist teaching leads us far beyond tranquility meditation. We are taught to see through tranquility and to understand its nature, so that the mind does not become caught up in it but remains above it. Nibbāna is above tranquility. The Lord Buddha became enlightened by investigating the truth of his experiences, including his thoughts. He sat and observed His mind under the Bodhi Tree on the bank of Nerañjarā River. Desires and defilements came in the form of thoughts to build a house in His mind. But He perceived and recognized them. They were instrumental for his enlightenment.

Dhamma is in Everything

Anything I experience, whether suffering or thoughts, is there for me to investigate. It is an object for training the mind, to reveal the Truth, to help me gain wisdom, and to test my mind. I just have to do what I can to pass the test. Sometimes I fail, but it doesn't matter. The mind becomes more experienced and it helps to strengthen the mind. As time goes by, the experience of failing and passing the test has made one's awareness increase. I always end up with self-awareness because I have taught myself and practiced like this by myself. **Developing awareness is truly reliable. It is the creation of a true refuge for one's mind, the Dhamma medicine that helps to return one's being to its original state of normality. Whenever I have any problem or suffering in my life, I will turn to investigating and training the mind so that it becomes my whole being. Life can be turned around from bad to good by living one's life according to the Dhamma: the Law of Nature.**

Awareness sets my mind free from the body. The body is no longer too much of a burden to the mind.

Awareness helps to intercept thoughts so that the mind does not become dominated by thoughts to the point of losing its state of normality.

Awareness is like purging impurities and sorrow in the mind, making the mind clean and pure.

Awareness has made my life better every day, like the saying of the Lord Buddha, **"A fully aware person gets better every day"**. And life is really getting better; one can see for oneself and directly experience by oneself. Self-awareness/mindfulness is the pinnacle of all the truths of the Dhamma. It is the noble inner refuge, the foundation of my life. Disability might make me suffer, but awareness helps set me free from suffering.

I may be unlucky to become disabled to the extent of being incapable to look after myself, and having to depend on others' kindness to help me and look after me. But that is just the body. As regards the mind, I don't need any help. I can take care of the mind myself. I encourage myself and get rid of suffering in the mind myself. I can depend on myself psychologically with the practice of developing awareness. I count myself lucky to be born as a human-being and to have found Buddhism. I live among my father, mother, and relatives; in a very good environment indeed. I am even luckier to have discovered Luang Por Teean's method of developing awareness, and to have Luang Por Khamkhan as the teacher advising me on developing awareness. I have followed his advice and have achieved a satisfactory result, that is to find the path to end suffering myself. This has greatly lessened my suffering. All the people I have mentioned have greatly supported me. I have nothing to offer them in return except to pay them homage by practicing meditation. I will carry on with this practice until my mind experiences the highest virtue in Buddhism, the point at which the mind is completely liberated from suffering. After that I will help to carry on the mission of my teachers by giving advice to practitioners who are training their minds to lessen or completely end their suffering. I am willing to be a good friend to all beings who share the nature of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

Obstacles during the Practice

It has been approximately three years, from 1995 to 1998, since I started the practice of developing awareness. During this period, I have experienced the following obstacles.

1. **Posture:** A disabled person will experience some problems with the postures or positions in the practice of developing insight. However, there is room for some maneuvering within one's limitations. I have developed awareness using some parts of my body which still function reasonably well. I cannot take up the three main postures; sitting, standing, and walking, so most of the time I practice in the lying position. I normally lie down on my back while turning my hands. After a while, the hands become weak so I have to change to another position to continue my practice. Practicing in one position for too long makes one's awareness dull. As a result, one has to find a new position in order to become more alert. Sometimes my mind was overpowered by drowsiness or excessive thoughts and I wanted to completely detach the mind from those feelings. However, I cannot do so with any position other than turning my body to lie on the left or right side. Sometimes I was successful in completely pulling my mind out of those feelings. At other times I had to make quick and forceful movements to stimulate the mind to become alert and consequently free from those emotions. Because one's physical movements are restricted, one has to think of ways to adapt one's practice to fit in with the situation as much as one can in order to develop awareness.

2. **Physical suffering:** A person with physical disability usually develops complications which sometimes turn chronic, such as feeling no sensation in the body, having stomach ache, indigestion, or heartburn. And when the weather is hot, one will feel very hot and needs to cool one's body with water. These are obstacles in developing awareness. When severe physical pain or discomfort becomes strong and cannot be relieved by any medication or help, patience has to be adopted in the development of awareness. Sometimes, one has to wait until the suffering has subsided before one can resume the practice.

3. **Emotions:** These arise due to outside factors which trouble the mind. When one practices meditation at home, there are always many outside factors troubling the mind. These range from material objects to noise, sound, etc. Confronting these emotions sometimes makes one forgetful and one can get caught up in them; hence one's awareness does not become very well established. Sometimes my practice was interrupted by visitors with whom I had to talk to for social reasons. My practice was therefore not continuous because chatting undermines one's focus on being in the present moment. It does not support the development of awareness. This is an obstacle. On certain occasions, I had to wait for an opportunity to be quiet or alone, which was a waste of time. I needed to have a quiet, peaceful moment in order to practice properly. At other times, the environment was not favorable, I had to create my own environment, looking for a quiet corner in the house to develop awareness. But after a long period of practice, I have been more experienced and awareness becomes sharper and stronger. It is now the master to emotions caused by outside factors, that once troubled my mind. So I have overcome this obstacle.

4. **Thoughts:** For me, the obstacles are not the unwholesome thoughts, but the good and virtuous thoughts of wanting to achieve the final goal, to be free from suffering quickly. These thoughts are full of desires. For example, I thought of leaving home to practice in a quiet and peaceful place, to be closer to teachers. I wanted to see living examples of the practice and would have liked to have had good friends who were also practitioners, so we might have developed awareness together. I wanted the environment in which I could meet people who lived their daily lives working with self-awareness throughout the day. I also would have liked to have met or to have associated with people whose minds were in the state of normality. As these thoughts were ridden with desires, they made my mind struggle. In brief, it was, “suffering caused by an unfulfilled desire for an object”. They may be good and creative thoughts but they are still just mental concoctions. They are not the mind itself. When I saw through them clearly, I was able to overcome this obstacle.

5. **Drowsiness/Sleepiness:** All practitioners usually experience this obstacle. It happened to me especially at the beginning when I had to practice in the lying posture, the position in which one is most susceptible to falling asleep. Teachers usually advise us to change our position, to walk, wash our face etc. in order to combat sleepiness. However, the only thing I can do is to turn my body to lie on my left or right side. It is very restricted. On some occasions, changing position like this did not help so I had to find my own solutions to deal with sleepiness. For example, while practicing, I would hold water in my mouth, making it difficult for me to breathe but helping me not to feel sleepy. **In fact, drowsiness/sleepiness is only the mind conditioning. It is not the mind. It is separate from the mind. This is the main thing to remember.** Sometimes, when we are being aware of our bodily movements, we may find that this sleepiness comes uninvited and overpowers our mind, hence this sleepiness/drowsiness displays the truth of ‘not self’: we didn’t invite it but it overwhelms us anyway. So we have to establish awareness more firmly by shifting the knowing/sensing of bodily movements to the middle point between the two eyebrows. We then widen the eyes to heighten awareness. Sleepiness will go away due to the strength of our awareness, as though afraid. Once sleepiness disappears, we can continue being aware of our bodily movements.

These five obstacles mentioned above do not always impede the development of awareness. There are ways to overcome these obstacles, which only occur at the beginning of the practice. I experienced them in the first three years. Now when I encounter these obstacles, I use them as the objects of investigation. They are instrumental to the development of my awareness, helping the awareness to be increasingly firm and well established, and enabling me to gain more experience. These obstacles are not-self; they are merely illusions which work at deceiving us. In the end we have to let go of all of them to be at one with awareness; we live in the present moment, seeing everything in accordance with the truth. This is the most superior way to live one’s life. Try to score a lot on this. When one places the importance on one’s awareness, other things become of no value. We will be able to overcome all of these obstacles and achieve the goal of our practice.

Final Chapter

Disability is only inconvenience not an illness. It is just a physical inconvenience about which one has no choice. However, one has a choice about the mind; one can consciously choose to be happy, to find happiness even in unsatisfactory situations by developing insight.

Any problem that we encounter has to be solved in any case. It is something we cannot control and sometimes cannot choose. However, we have a choice whether to solve the problem with a troubled or an untroubled mind. This we can choose. This is because everyone was born to be free from suffering so we must not carry it in our hearts. We must be fair to our mind.

Developing awareness can transform oneself from being a sufferer to the state of seeing suffering. This is because the pure state of awareness is not a being. It is neither a woman nor a man. Neither is it right nor wrong, happy nor unhappy. It is not dualistic. It exists above and beyond all things. It is the single state of pure indifferent knowing or sensing. Any duty one is required to perform is to be conventionally carried out with the balanced mind that is free from suffering.

Exit from Suffering

Any problem that we encounter
has to be solved in any case.
It is something we cannot control
and sometimes cannot choose.
However, we have a choice
whether to solve the problem with a troubled
or an untroubled mind.
This we can choose.
This is because everyone was born
to be free from suffering
so we must not carry it in our hearts.
We must be fair to our mind.

**From bad
to good**

Developing awareness is truly reliable.
It is the creation of a true refuge for one's mind,
the Dhamma medicine that helps
to return one's being to its original state of normality.
Whenever I have any problem
or suffering in my life,
I will turn to investigating and training the mind
so that it becomes my whole being.
Life can be turned around from bad to good
by living one's life
according to the Dhamma: the Law of Nature.

**From the Sufferer
to a Non-Sufferer**

Developing awareness can transform oneself
from being a sufferer to the state of seeing suffering.
This is because the pure state of awareness
is not a being.
It is neither a woman nor a man.
Neither is it right nor wrong,
happy nor unhappy.
It is not dualistic.
It exists above and beyond all things.
It is the single state of
pure indifferent knowing or sensing.
Any duty one is required to perform
is to be conventionally carried out
with the balanced mind that is free from suffering.

**Bright and Shining Mind
In a Disabled Body**

Disability is only inconvenience
not an illness.

It is just a physical inconvenience
about which one has no choice.

However, one has a choice about the mind;
one can consciously choose to be happy,
to find happiness
even in unsatisfactory situations
by developing insight.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ANSWER TO YOUR QUERIES

Since 1999 the year from which I had the opportunity to practice Dhamma at Sugato Forest Monastery, people have come to talk to me and asked me many questions. Some questions were about me and some were about the people who asked questions themselves. There were a lot of questions relating to the development of awareness. A selection of questions here are questions people frequently ask, and which I can remember. The answers I have given are mainly from my own experience of practice. Some are from what I have heard from teachers or read in text books. These answers may be right or wrong so I would like the readers to consider them first without instantly accepting or rejecting them.

1. I would like to know how you felt after having the accident that made you disabled for the rest of your life.

During the initial period after the accident in which I was receiving treatment at Central Hospital in Bangkok, I thought it was a dream, a nightmare. I was confused and unable to think clearly. And when I learned that I was to be disabled for the rest of my life, my worry increased. I thought all day and all night, experiencing both physical and psychological suffering. The body was painful and I was disappointed. An image of me sitting on a wheelchair for a disabled person and lying down on a bed, immobile and bedridden, often came into my mind and made me feel unhappy. Had I been disabled from birth, I would probably have not been that unhappy. I would probably have been able to adapt to the situation from birth, without having to spend a long time adjusting myself. However, I had been used to a body that functioned normally for 24 years, so when the body became defective and disabled, I felt very sorry. I felt irritated and worried that I would no longer be able to do anything. My life probably came to ruin. All of my confidence also crumbled. It was like I had drowned in suffering and would also in the future.

2. Have you ever thought of committing suicide?

The thought of killing myself never entered my head but I used to feel tired of living in this world. I felt the world was boring and full of suffering day in day out. Some people showed their sympathy to me by saying that if it were them, they would probably have killed themselves long time ago. That was like pointing the way to the thief. But I relied on my patience. I tried to put up with everything and resolved to be patient to the end. People around me and members of my family play an important part in helping me in this kind of situation. My family never put any pressure on me to make me feel suicidal. They only gave me words of encouragement. I also thought that if I killed myself, it would cause grief to my parents. They already suffered because of me and they would suffer even more if I killed myself. It was one of the reasons I did not think of committing suicide.

However, in the language of the Dhamma, killing oneself is good. It is to annihilate one's ego, not to destroy the body. The body knows nothing. It has been a good slave to us. We use the body to do many things. It is pitiful. However, what we should be getting rid of is the thought of committing suicide. That is to slay the wrong thinking that this body and mind is our very own. We should eliminate this thought. When wrong thinking has been destroyed, suffering will never arise.

3. What is the state of mind of a person who is suffering?

A person who suffers will feel irritated, worried, restless, temperamental, and is likely to do things to spite oneself. Sometimes he feels like crying or wanting to kill himself.

4. How did you control your mind while being patient to combat suffering?

I didn't do anything to control my mind. I just accepted the truth about the situation I found myself in. Accepting the truth helped to calm me down. I felt like I had let go of something in my mind. And I felt that if I had to die, I would just accept it. That's all.

5. What inspired you to choose the Dhamma to solve problems in your life? Have you ever thought of any other ways before?

In the past, I was never interested in the Dhamma. I enjoyed myself watching, listening to, and entertaining myself with things outside to cover up problems I had, the way I always did. I misunderstood that those entertainments could get rid of my suffering. And they did to a certain extent. While we are having a good time, we temporarily forget our problems. But after a while, we become fed up and unhappy again. We escape from one problem to another, like running away from a tiger to a crocodile. The relief of suffering is therefore temporary. In fact, it shouldn't be called 'the relief of suffering'. It would be more correct to call it, 'the cover up of suffering'. However, such cover up is not successful because suffering still comes up. It has not been completely extinguished. My father and mother are the ones who introduced me to the noble path. They made me interested in the Dhamma, the teaching of the Lord Buddha, and they practiced the Dhamma as examples themselves. Also, I thought since I intended to be ordained but missed the opportunity, I should have used this situation to study and practice the Dhamma instead. I was therefore inspired to walk on the Dhamma path.

6. What was the pivotal point in your life when you started to suffer less?

At the beginning after I just had the accident, I suffered a lot and had to rely on my patience to put up with it. After a while, I got used to the suffering. Also suffering is not permanent so as time went by I felt I didn't suffer as much as before. When Luang Por Khamkhan kindly advised me about the dynamic meditation, using movements to develop awareness, I felt more encouraged. I was blessed by a letter from Luang Por. I became hopeful, especially on the practice of meditation which I thought was not possible for a disabled person. Later on, my attitude changed to 'I can do it', and it made me become more confident. When I became encouraged, I felt better. This was the pivotal point in my life. Encouragement given by the teacher is very beneficial. In fact, reading and listening to the Dhamma at the beginning made me feel somewhat better but I did not evidently achieve anything because I did not feel uplifted. But life seemed to become bright and lively just by thinking about practicing, without actually doing it. That's why I came to understand that to have a life, one's mind must be fresh and bright, then one can be "lively". Anyone who is not fresh and bright is like a person without life, a dead person, like a withering tree waiting to die. It could be said that the tree is not lively.

If one's mind is properly prepared
when dealing with problems and obstacles,
one will not suffer.
Problems are only there for us to solve.
And obstacles are only there
for us to overcome.
That is all.

7. I would like to know how people around you have changed in terms of their feelings and reactions before and after you took up Dhamma practice?

Before practicing the Dhamma, I suffered a great deal. This made people around me suffer as well, especially my father and mother who looked unhappy. However, after the practice, I experienced a mental transformation. I suffered less and was able to smile. The atmosphere in my family brightened up. But what I am proud of is the fact that I was instrumental to my father turning to the path of Dhamma practice. In the past, he was interested in amulets but not very keen on the teaching of the Buddha. After starting to develop self-awareness according to Luang Por Teean's approach, he changed from being short-tempered to being calm, and gave up his addiction to everything including alcoholic drinks, cigarettes, coffee, tea, inhalants, and pastille. He even refrained from eating in the evening. He was a good example for members of our family. At the time when he was dying, he was fully aware until the last moment and he passed away peacefully. He was gone like a 'Sugato', which means 'a well-gone person', the one who's gone with awareness. My mother also changed a lot from being the person who already had faith in Buddhism to having more faith. She spent her time developing awareness by going to stay with me at Sugato Forest Monastery, the same as my father did. I think that in the future when she is going to pass away, she will probably be a 'Sugato', the one who has gone well just like my father. These are the changes I clearly witnessed of people around me.

8. How can one seek happiness from suffering?

Actually, I haven't been seeking happiness. I only do my professional job. If my hands are not busy, my mind will be restless. But since I can hardly do any physical work, I take on this mental work instead. I work on developing awareness, being mindful of myself. I focus on mental work and make it my occupation. Developing awareness and being mindful of one's being helps one live in the present moment, the moment at which one is living one's life each day. For example, one should always be aware when acting, speaking, or thinking. When one is fully aware in the present moment, one forgets suffering. There is no time for suffering to be invited into oneself due to one's thought. The time is only there for being fully aware of oneself in the present moment. Emotions in the past and the future therefore do not arise because suffering usually comes when one is thinking about the past or the future. The secret of living in a state of non-suffering is to be in the present moment. Worries about the past, the future, or the present cannot come into existence. When the mind does not suffer, happiness comes into existence, that's all. I do not seek any external happiness. I only let go of suffering in the mind, and happiness comes in by itself. This is the internal happiness, calm, peaceful, and real. Once you experience this kind of happiness, you do not want to search for any other pleasures outside. As a matter of fact, I do not wish to call this 'happiness' because it is not safe to use this word as people are usually attached to it. Let's say it is the happiness arising from the mind which is free from suffering. That is safer.

It is very challenging to be fully aware in the present moment. Whatever happens, outside or inside, I will always be here. I will be at the point where I don't have to suffer psychologically. Awareness will clearly perceive suffering and does not

become a sufferer. Any problem will be conventionally solved. Where there is suffering, non-suffering is also there. We can choose not to suffer without having to escape to seek happiness. Happiness is right here with us in the present moment.

9. What can we do if there is a problem or an obstacle happening in our life?

Compose yourself first. Be calm and face that problem by investigating the cause, then solve the cause of the problem. This will enable us to solve the problem once and for all. If we can't think of anything and don't know what to do, do not act. Try consulting a pundit (a learned person) so that he can give an advice or encouragement to you to regain yourself.

If one's mind is properly prepared when dealing with problems and obstacles, one will not suffer. Problems are only there for us to solve. And obstacles are only there for us to overcome. That is all. However, because of our wrong perception, we take hold of everything as suffering. We create the state of suffering within our mind. Wise and clever people also have problems and obstacles because some events are not under one's control and sometimes there is no choice. But they do not attach to them as problems, obstacles, or suffering. They just get on with solving the problems and overcoming the obstacles without suffering in their minds. They are pundits in Dhamma.

10. Why do you choose Luang Por Teean's approach to develop awareness? Have you ever tried any other methods? And what is the right way to train the mind in order to extinguish suffering?

I tried some other methods but not seriously because I could not sit for very long. I spent most of the time in the lying position. Training my mind while lying down and keeping my eyes closed made me fall asleep easily. Whenever I meditated, I fell asleep.

Luang Por Teean's approach of developing awareness concentrates on being constantly aware of one's physical and mental movements. You are advised not to stay still so that the mind is always aware, awake, and alert, without thinking. Thoughts, however, are not to be suppressed or followed, but to be seen through and let go of. Calmness is not the only aim. This approach is therefore suitable for my condition. I can practice while lying down.

Training the mind and practicing the Dhamma to free oneself from suffering, by whatever approach, usually starts with developing 'Sati' or awareness, for example Kāyagatasati (mindfulness of the body), Anussati 10 (10 practices to develop constant mindfulness), Anāpānāsati (mindfulness on breathing) and Satipaṭṭhāna (The Four foundations of mindfulness). The word 'Sati' (awareness/mindfulness) appears in these practices. **If one starts by developing 'Sati' (awareness), that is correct. Awareness will lead to clear comprehension, concentration, and wisdom, which helps one to let go of defilements, the cause of suffering. Suffering consequently does not arise. The only difference is the method by which the practitioner uses to train the mind or develop awareness.**

11. How can one achieve the result quickly from developing awareness?

The practitioner has to be constantly aware of himself/herself in every posture throughout the day except when sleeping. Awareness should be developed not only in a practicing session, when one is creating rhythmic movements or walking meditation, but also in one's daily life. **Whatever activity you are doing each day, do it with awareness. Always move and feel consciously. Keep on being aware of yourself continuously. Awareness will increase and lead you to wisdom.** A comparison can be made to when you are having a meal, you need to put food in your mouth more than once to make you feel full. Or when we pound chilies to make curry paste, we have to keep on pounding to get the result.

12. How can I tell whether I have made any progress or whether I have practiced correctly?

The Dhamma is 'Sanditṭhiko', that is you can see the result for yourself. If it is so then it is correct. You can make simple assessments. For example, if you practice correctly, you would become increasingly aware of your actions, speech, and thinking. Or when you are experiencing emotions due to contact through the eyes or ears, you would be able to see through them. Your mind would not be distracted. It would be calm and sensitive to any object in contact but not affected by it. Your mind would remain in the state of normality without any doubt. What's important is that your suffering would lessen. This you can be certain of. If you practice but your suffering is increasing, that means you are not doing it correctly.

13. Is there any way we can persuade people around us to practice like we do?

This is a very good question. We should influence each other to do virtuous things. It is good to practice the Dhamma to train one's mind. It is the most important thing in life. Developing awareness, in particular, is the way to create refuge for oneself as awareness is hugely beneficial. Sometimes only verbal persuasion is not enough. We must practice as an example, and be happy, for them to see. If they can experience peace and calmness within you, that will be more effective.

14. What should one take into account when developing awareness?

The most important thing is how to prepare your mind. If it is not correct, it will be a waste of your time and delay you. But if your mind is properly prepared and you practice sufficiently, you will discover an easy short cut. For example, focusing on being aware of physical movements has to be done correctly. That is the mind should be indifferent and simply aware, not thinking about anything. It should be balanced and neutral. Your mind should be kept in the state of no anticipation, not hoping or wanting to gain anything from the practice. Or if you are diligent, for example, constantly making bodily movements, that is also good, but you also have to be diligent in being aware of those movements for awareness to increase. If bodily movements are constantly made but the mind is scattered, floating, and not being here and now, then you are still regarded as being lazy and not persevering enough. The important thing is how your mind is

prepared. Be constantly aware of the body and the mind in the present moment and do it continuously like a chain. That is enough.

15. Dhamma Practice/mental cultivation is the best thing to do but I have very little time, what shall I do?

I've always heard people complaining about having no time, mainly as an excuse. Do we really have no time, or is it that we don't make the time for it? If we make the time for the practice, we will have time. If not, we won't. In this matter, I think that **if we value anything because we see that it is beneficial, then we will always have time for it.** For example, if we appreciate and place a lot of importance on money and property, we would be diligent and always have time for it. We even work overtime. Similarly, if we appreciate and value the importance of mental cultivation, we would have more time for it. We may even do it overtime. This is due to how you value or appreciate the benefit of the Dhamma.

We are lucky to be born as human-beings and to have found Buddhism. Would we just spend our time pursuing pleasures and wasting our lives in ignorance? You should give yourself a chance and give some time to yourself to practice the Dhamma, to discover the best thing a human-being could have. It will be worthwhile being born.

16. How can one get rid of the habit of procrastination or putting off an action until later?

I never thought that I would be spending my life in a disabled body like this. I did not hope and dream of this. But because of life's uncertainty, this happened to me. I therefore would like to remind everyone, with love and concern, not to be heedless in life. Who knows what could happen to us? Please don't be complacent. Start living your life practicing the Dhamma to find your inner refuge while your body is still strong and experiences little pain. You don't have to wait until you become disabled or full of suffering like me before practicing. Such physical conditions may completely discourage you and makes you feel hopeless. Too much suffering or too many physical problems will make the practice difficult and full of obstacles. **All sentient beings cannot escape from old age, sickness, and death. They shall part from each other and are subject to their own Kamma (actions). These are sufferings waiting to happen to you now and in the future. If you do not seek a refuge, which is the Dhamma, when suffering occurs, you will become a pitiful destitute with nothing to turn to.** So please don't be lazy. Start to train your mind from now and one day you shall be sublimely blissful.

17. Why do we progress very well when practicing at the monastery, but become forgetful and unaware when we are back at home?

There is a stark difference between the monastery and home or office. The environment at the monastery, in particular, is supportive to developing awareness. There are good friends and teachers there to help us. The place is more peaceful and quieter than at home or office. However, the difference is only the environment. 'Sati' or awareness is not different. It has the duty to be aware, to know just the same. Whether you are at the

monastery, at home or office, you can always be aware. Just be quick and alert with your awareness.

Therefore, we don't have to differentiate between places. Wherever we are, and in whatever circumstances, we should prepare our mind to be aware and fully alert. This is enough.

All sentient beings cannot escape
from old age, sickness, and death.
They shall part from each other
and are subject to
their own Kamma (actions).
These are sufferings
waiting to happen to you
now and in the future.

18. What should one do when one becomes bored, discouraged, and is in despair when practicing the Dhamma?

These symptoms may arise because we are too hopeful for the result, or we feel we are not progressing. It doesn't matter if these conditions arise. Just be patient and persevere further. Keep on practicing. Do not stop. Soon these conditions will diminish or disappear because they are only mind conditionings. They are not permanent. They arise and pass away. When we practice meditation or develop awareness, we will instantly get the abstract results recorded onto our mind all the time. It is not like the worldly kind of work from which you gain material or concrete results. That is more evident. Just tell yourself it doesn't matter if you don't get the result now or today. You may achieve more in the future. A comparison can be made to when you are chewing a sugar cane. It is tasteless at the end but gets sweeter nearer to its root. **Sometimes we have to motivate ourselves to be enthusiastic to practice. We must learn to encourage ourselves when we feel disheartened or are in despair. Encouragement must first come from us then from others. Encouragement from others is like a bonus. It is better to be self-motivated as nobody knows ourselves as well as we do.**

19. How can we solve the problem of feeling sleepy while developing awareness?

Sleepiness or drowsiness is like every practitioner's good friend. It always comes to visit. This is nothing strange because at the time before taking up meditation practice, we also experience sleepiness as part of nature. It is good that we feel sleepy. It means we are normal. So we should be thankful; otherwise, we may have to find drugs to help us to sleep due to lack of feeling sleepy. There are many ways I'd like to recommend to tackle sleepiness. For example, you can move any part of your body quickly and forcefully; change your posture; go to practice in a brighter place; look at the sky; look at all directions; widen your eyes; slap your face; drink plenty of water; sweep the floor; eat less, etc. **However, it is better if you can find your own way to deal with this problem. It will be more effective than any advice received from others because their techniques may not always work for you.**

The main thing to do to deal with sleepiness is not to stop or control it but acknowledge that sleepy feeling and put your attention to developing awareness of physical movements to compete against it. One must be patient. This is the practitioner's duty. You don't have to do anything to sleepiness at all. When you feel sleepy while practicing, you can change your posture. Myself, I am immobile so I have to combat against sleepiness without ever being defeated. If we keep our mind strong, we will be able to overcome sleepiness. This is because sleepiness is not permanent. It comes and goes. Sleepiness is the Dhamma, it is Nature. Do not dislike it because it is part of our lives. Any practitioner, who sees/observes sleepiness while practicing, is seeing the Dhamma. We just have to be fully aware. But don't indulge yourself in it.

It is good to have many thoughts arising
because we will be increasingly aware of them.
Do not dislike thoughts
because they are also
part of our lives.

20. What shall I do with thoughts that keep on arising so excessively while practicing that it is impossible to stop them?

Thought is also an enemy to many practitioners. In my opinion it is good that you can still think. A person without any thought is a dead person. Thoughts are natural. They are the Dhamma. **While practicing, if thoughts arise, let them. Don't do anything to them nor try to deal with them. Do not stop them. Do not indulge in them. Do not control them. What's important is not to get caught up in them. Just be fully and neutrally aware of them. Thoughts will go away by themselves. If they don't, return to be aware of your bodily movements. Do not forget this foundation of mindfulness as regards to the body. Do your duty by being aware of the body in competition with thoughts.** If we let thoughts be as they are without trying to elaborate or concoct more details about them, they will be short-lived and disappear quickly. And if we place no value on them, they will hardly arise. In fact, for practitioners, it is good to have many thoughts arising because we will be increasingly aware of them. Do not dislike thoughts because they are also part of our lives.

21. What should I do if I have a headache, dizziness, stress, or feel pressure in my chest while practicing?

These symptoms are regarded as obstacles for practitioners. You may develop these symptoms because you have too strong an intention to get results. You don't want any thoughts to arise. You want to be calm. The mind is too controlled; it is not free. These symptoms occur due to too much concentration. To solve this problem, stop for a while and adjust your vision by looking into the distance, looking at the top of a tree, sky, etc. Relax and look around outside. Alternatively, you may breathe in deeply, stop, then exhale slowly. Do this five times. It will clear your brain. You will feel relaxed and at ease. Any stress or scattered thoughts will disappear. Or you may drink lots of water. Water not only refreshes you but also helps to de-stress you. After these symptoms have gone, you can resume your practice. You will not be stressed if you practice at ease with a little smile on your face.

22. How can I solve the problem of having the desire to achieve quick results?

It is normal to expect a result. However, if you are too hopeful, your mind will struggle and not be peaceful because of the desire. You will be full of doubts about the practice and this will be an obstacle for you. **Results come from the work you put into something. Developing awareness is like building up your work. You should concentrate on this. If the work is done properly and sufficiently, you don't even have to think about the results. It will automatically come to you.**

23. How can we overcome our fear?

If you mean 'fear of ghosts', then stay put in order to confront the fear as it arises. Do not run away, as this fear may lead you to wisdom. Be fully aware of the fear and it will go away. If it doesn't, then be attentive to your bodily movements. Consciously make fast and forceful movements to combat the fear. Be a little patient. When it has reached its

peak, it will begin to diminish and finally disappear. Fear is mind conditioning so it is impermanent and cannot last. The Lord Buddha advises us to “be aware of suffering”, confront it without running away. Ghosts will only haunt people who are afraid of them.

24. How can we prepare our mind when physical aches and pains arise during the practice?

Be mindful of them because you need to be aware of suffering. And be a little patient so that you will learn something from this experience. Then change your posture with awareness to relieve those aches and pains. Change your posture with awareness without feeling unhappy or annoyed. Physical pain is normal. In fact, you should be thankful for being able to feel aches and pains. It shows that your body still functions properly. If the body can feel no sensation, that means there is something wrong with it. It may be paralyzed like mine.

25. I usually get attached to and want tranquility while developing awareness. What should I do?

In the practice of developing awareness, one does not aim for tranquility alone. The focus is mainly on being fully awake and alert at all times. Tranquility is, for the practitioner, only something on the way. If your mind becomes still and absorbed without being aware of anything, then get out of that state. Don't get stuck in it. This is the tranquility of ignorance. It makes the mind inactive. The mind neither wants to make any bodily movements nor be aware of anything. Your practice will go nowhere if you get attached to and aim only for tranquility. When you fail to achieve the state of tranquility, you will suffer as tranquility itself is not permanent.

The way to practice is to be aware of the mind when it is calm. When the mind is not calm, be aware of that also. Then let them both go. Don't be attached to either of them. If your mind gets stuck in the state of tranquility, then consciously move any part of your body fast and forcefully. Or you can change your posture to heighten awareness so that it will become fully awake and alert.

Buddhist teaching is far beyond the level of being absorbed in tranquility. It is to have wisdom beyond tranquility, to see tranquility and to always be aware and mindful. This is tranquility with awareness.

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26. What should one do when doubts arise while practicing?

When any doubts arise while practicing, don't try to find any answers. Otherwise, one will remain doubtful, always looking for answers without ending. The way to overcome doubts is to not get caught up in them. See that a doubt is not us or ours. Observe it and see it as only mental conditioning. Doubts will destabilize the mind's balance and make it distracted. It will suffer. As soon as we are aware and see through them, we will be instantly free from them.

27. How can we overcome the desire for sensual pleasures?

The desires for sensual pleasures make the mind agitated, exhausted, imbalanced, and confused. It will suffer. Desire for sensual pleasures is caused by thoughts. In order to overcome this desire, you have to overcome thoughts first. To overcome thoughts, you have to constantly develop awareness, as this will watch over thoughts so that they hardly arise. Awareness will intercept thoughts. Luang Por Teean made a comparison that awareness is like a cat; whereas thoughts are like mice. When we have mice in our house, we don't have to chase them away. We keep a cat and feed it well so that it will be strong enough to catch the mice.

Developing awareness is like feeding the cat. If you keep on doing this, awareness will increase and you will be able to overcome the desire for sensual pleasures that comes with thoughts.

28. How can we overcome anger?

Anger is a condition of the mind. It defiles the mind and makes the body develop all kinds of illnesses and diseases. Your skin becomes dull and you suffer physically and psychologically. When one is angry, one will be unhappy in this life and in the afterlife. Contemplate anger to see how much suffering it brings, see its many harmful effects, you will not want to be angry again.

When anger arises, be aware of it with a balanced mind. Don't say or do anything. Be patient and wait. Anger will finally diminish and disappear. Luang Por Khamkhian told us to **“watch and see, to make pure observation without identifying with or becoming it”** because anger itself is impermanent and not-self. If anger persists and gets stronger, then concentrate on your bodily movements. Move faster, more forcefully and continuously for some time. Or you may breathe in deeply, stop for ten seconds, then exhale slowly. Do this five times with awareness, the anger will go by itself.

There is a Buddhist proverb, “Eliminating anger makes life peaceful”. What's the use of being angry and making yourself unhappy? Soon people you are angry with will pass away according to their kamma and you will also pass away according to your kamma. They will die and you will also die. Are we going to harbor animosity towards each other till the day we die? It is better to forgive one another, as all beings share the same experience of suffering. It is better to be friends.

29. How come you neither have to close your eyes nor recite mantras when you develop awareness according to Luang Por Teean’s approach?

You can close your eyes if you like. It is not compulsory. But you don’t have to close your eyes. You can naturally open your eyes as normal. Regarding a mantra, you need not have a mantra. A mantra is used by the practitioner to be aware of the here and now. However, with Luang Por Teean’s approach, a mantra is not required. You are to be aware of your bodily movements directly. The body movements are used as a foundation of awareness, which is called ‘Kāyanupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna’ (mindfulness as regards to the body).

30. In your daily life, people come to talk to you, and you have to listen to many stories, some are important and some are not. How do you feel and how do you develop awareness?

I just listen and if I can give some advice to them, I will do it conventionally. I regard everyone who comes to talk to me as a good friend, a friend who shares the experience of suffering in life. It doesn’t matter whether what they say is important or not. I do not mind. But I do think it must be important for them. I can listen to whatever people have to say, rightly or not, that doesn’t bother me. I just pay full attention to what they want to say so that they can get it off their chest, without me having to give any advice or say anything. I just listen neutrally with a balanced mind. Sometimes they go home feeling happy after having talked, so it is useful to both myself and them. What’s important is whether we are attached to what they say or not. These situations are also good for testing one’s mind. They are good Dhamma lessons and instruments for me.

To develop awareness while listening to stories or engaged in a conversation, you will listen and converse normally with full awareness. Keep your mind balanced in the state of normality, not going up or down. Stay fully in the present moment. This is how one develops awareness based on the four foundations of mindfulness, without having to depend on a particular form.

When one is angry,
one will be unhappy
in this life and in the afterlife.
Contemplate anger to see
how much suffering it brings,
see its many harmful effects,
you will not want to be angry again.

A fully aware person gets better every day.

Anything I experience,
whether suffering or thoughts,
is there for me to investigate.
It is an object for training the mind,
to reveal the Truth, to help me gain wisdom,
and to test my mind.
I just have to do what I can to pass the test.
Where there is suffering,
non-suffering is also there.
We can choose not to suffer
without having to escape to seek happiness.
Happiness is right here with us
in the present moment.
I saw this as a transformation of my life.
The mind has been transformed
from being disabled to being in a state of normality.
The mind is transformed
from suffering to non-suffering.
It is a psychological,
not physical, transformation.
“Awareness” has also helped me change,
and given me a new life.

Epilogue

I feel it has been worthwhile living as a disabled person for these many years. Problems or obstacles that pass into my life are lessons, teachers, and instruments for teaching me the Dhamma. They are there for me to investigate and to learn from, they make me more experienced and help me gain wisdom. Because of suffering, I have discovered the path to the cessation of suffering.

Today I no longer reject suffering. I sometimes feel thankful that it has given me an opportunity to study life, to know myself, and to train my mind in accordance with the path of the Dhamma. It has led me to find a bright path; an inner happiness, happiness in the Dhamma. This happiness is peaceful and real. It is the happiness that arises from a mind that is free from suffering.

The method of developing sati in daily life (From To One That Feels by Luang-por Teean Cittasubho)

When we get on a bus or boat, and are seated properly, we turn the palm up, we turn the palm down, we move the hand, or stretch the hand, or run the thumb over the fingertips; and blinking eyes, breathing, swallowing saliva, and so on, be aware of these movements. This is the way to have awareness returning to ourself. When thought arises be aware of it, and detach it.

The method of developing sati when we are at home

We can sit with both legs gathered back to one side, or cross-legged, or in a chair, or we can sit with legs outstretched. We can stand or lie down doing the rhythmic practice too. When we walk *caṅkama* (meditating while walking back and forth: a length of eight to twelve paces will do) we must not move the arms; fold the arms across the chest, or clasp the hands behind the back.¹⁰ The method of practice in a sitting position is shown in the stylized illustrations that follow:

1. Rest the hands palms down on the thighs.
2. Turn the right hand onto its edge, be aware.
3. Raise the right hand up, be aware, then stop.
4. Lower the right hand to rest on the abdomen, be aware, then stop.
5. Turn the left hand onto its edge, be aware, then stop.
6. Raise the left hand up, be aware, then stop.
7. Lower the left hand to rest on the right hand, be aware, then stop.
8. Slide the right hand up to rest on the chest, be aware, then stop.
9. Move the right hand out, be aware, then stop.
10. Lower the right hand onto its edge on the thigh, be aware, then stop.
11. Face the right palm down, be aware, then stop.
12. Slide the left hand up to rest on the chest, be aware, then stop.
13. Move the left hand out, be aware, then stop.
14. Lower the left hand onto its edge on the thigh, be aware, then stop.
15. Face the left palm down, be aware, then stop.

¹⁰ Luangpor Teean taught that during walking meditation the hands should be gently clasped in front



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