

AN INTERVIEW WITH

LOO-ANG POR

QUESTION: 'I would like to ask how long it took you for a change to take place in your mind when you first set out to practice with LOO-ANG POR TEE-AN?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'One month. I was still a layman then.'

The first ten days I didn't know anything yet. Some people said that just seven days was sufficient to know RUPA-NAMA. A novice came to ask me, 'Why don't you understand yet? I just practiced for a week and I understood RUPA-NAMA.' I didn't feel so good about that. I asked L.P. TEE-AN about it: 'Is there anybody who has practiced with you who didn't get any knowledge?' L.P. TEE-AN answered, 'No, there isn't!'

'I guess I must be the first one then', I said. That's what I thought, I felt inferior. But when I had practiced for nearly a month I understood the basic stage.

I caught on. I knew RUPA and NAMA, I knew the body, I knew the mind.

The body or the mind didn't fool me. Now I knew the direction and I felt confident.'

QUESTION: 'At that time were you doing the rhythmic or walking meditation?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'When I came to know I was doing walking meditation. When I started out to practice I didn't sit much, it made me sleepy. I walked more. I avoided sitting.

In the beginning I couldn't sit much. Sometimes it would rain and I would walk with an umbrella because I'd be sleepy, sitting.'

QUESTION: 'How long after that did the second change take place?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'When I knew RUPA-NAMA it wasn't just that much, but it was as if there was a spiritual power – as if I didn't do anything: I just watched and knowledge would arise. There was knowing and knowing, continuous knowing. I knew liberation in stages.

I intuitively knew what was right and wrong. I thought to have a debate with L.P. TEE-AN.

If he would not accept what was right, for example if he would not approve of my seeing RUPA-NAMA I would insist. I was confident. I knew convention, merit and demerit.

Something had dropped off the mind but I had to train more.

When I came back here I ordained and continued to practice.

I came to know SILA, SAMADHI and PANYA (virtue, firmness of mind and wisdom).

I realized that after I got it.

I think that I knew the direction to go in since the first year but I hadn't practiced all the way yet. It was as if everything was ready except that I hadn't done it yet.

In the third year I really came to understanding, I got the answers to life.

At the time I didn't know or imagine that I got there.'

QUESTION: 'That was the final change, in your third year, was it?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Yes, that's right.'

QUESTION: 'What was it like during that period?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'I don't know how to describe it. Things that used to be there disappeared, both physical and mental things. Things that had never been there appeared.

I'm not claiming that 'I am an ARAHANT' (fully enlightened One), but a change took place in my life, something that has never happened before.

For example, attachment to the body is finished.

That which has arisen I can use up to this day – it is not wrong.

The things I used to identify with, I no longer identify with, it is completely finished.

QUESTION: 'What about the knowledge you used to have about magical charms, verses and spells?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'That's all finished, finished since the beginning, since I knew RUPA-NAMA and convention. The identification with being a good person, someone who knows a lot about superstition is finished altogether. There is nothing to doubt about.

Since that day, I'm not stuck: not attached to ceremonies, rituals and so on.

Before, I used to be deluded by convention. Now, there is not a trace of delusion left.

When I went home I was a different person, it was like being born anew.

Previously, when I was at home, I would tie white string around the wrists of my relatives and friends, I would do this and that. But now, I've stopped, I won't do it anymore.

One ought to believe what one can experience for oneself: we are the owners of our actions (KAMMA). I told my parents and relatives to quit all this superstition.'

QUESTION: 'Did you sit or walk, that final time?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'It happened after the meal, I was sitting.'

QUESTION: 'It was in the morning then?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Right, I was doing the rhythmic meditation leaning against a small tree.'

QUESTION: 'Where was it?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'At the BUDDHAYANA forest.'

That day, it was getting close to the time to have the midday-meal.

After the meal, all the monks got up and left but L.P.TEE-AN and I were still there.

L.P.TEE-AN asked me why I didn't get up too. I told him my experience.

He said, 'You're stupid, when things are separated like that, come back here!'

(come back to awareness). He looked at me and said, 'Do it again!'

So, teachers are necessary when one is not skilled.

Because of this I would like to say that L.P.TEE-AN was the teacher, the one who gave birth to awareness and wisdom.

Nobody had ever taught me this; other people only teach and know other things.

QUESTION; 'What was the first thing you thought of after you had put things down or had been liberated?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'I thought of my father and mother.'

That it is natural for parents to raise their children. That people are willing to go through a lot of difficulties and suffering precisely so that those who are born may come to know

'this thing'. I thought that if people can actually get to know this, then it can be taken that there has been a purpose to the naturally created world. Parents who raise children do so for this very reason. If a child doesn't get to know this point, then it will have to be reborn.

That was what I was thinking : that one is born in order not to be born again.

I felt that whatever L.P.TEE-AN would want me to do, I would oblige and have confidence in him. And so I went to ask him: 'What do you want me to do?'

He said, 'If the state that arose is real, then help me to teach, help me to talk, teaching people; other than that there isn't anything to do.'

QUESTION: 'When you were thinking of your parents, did you feel like helping them?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'I did. As soon as I had this knowledge, my mother was the first person

I went to see. I urged her to come and stay at the monastery

but she said that she couldn't stay at a place that is a charnel-ground.

And so I searched for somebody to keep her company. The mother of a fellow-monk and relative was willing to go. I also induced the head-man of the village to train himself, thinking that they would realize what I had realized.

But when I taught them they didn't get results.

At first I wanted all people to be under my guidance, I wanted to teach everybody because everybody has the same potential.

The duty of us human beings is to come to this point; it is a path in itself.

To go in any other direction is not right.

I still hold my mother to be the most important person. I will continue teaching her until I die.

These days I still try to teach her. If I didn't have a mother I probably wouldn't be here.'

QUESTION: 'How old is your mother?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'She's 80.'

QUESTION: 'And what about your father, is he still alive?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'My father died when I was still small.

It would be good if he had still been alive. He was a very serious and good person, everyone in the family and the village accepted, loved and respected him. He had no enemies. He thought in good ways – it's too bad he died.'

QUESTION: 'How many children do you have?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Just one. When I took ordination my wife was four months pregnant.'

QUESTION: 'Was it very hard to make that decision?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'At first I was only 50% sure about what to do. I was worried about it and what people in the village would think of it. I am not a bad or low kind of person.

The villagers respect me because I use my life in a way that is worthy.

I'm not lazy and I'm not detested by society.

People used to respect me because I was a magical healer.

If a woman was pregnant in our village, people would say in a straightforward way:

'Don't go off anywhere, stay at home and be a refuge to her.'

Because of this I was worried and I was only 50% sure.

But as soon as I understood the basic stage of DHAMMA, I was sure 100% and not worried about anything. I knew that this was the right path. The reason to go and practice was to be able to be responsible; now I could teach people to use their lives in this way.

If I was the head of a family, I would love just my wife, children and relatives.

But now I don't love just them, I feel responsible for all human beings in the world!

And so I decided that this was the right thing to do. No arguments could sway me.

I have been confident up to the present day. I have been a monk for over 20 years and I'm still confident that there is nothing about it that is wrong or is a mistake.'

QUESTION: 'Did you care for nature very much before you realized the DHAMMA?

Because now you are engaged with this aspect too, such as preserving forests.'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Not at all. This arose afterwards, when I understood nature. I don't just love humanity, I love nature, I love the environment. A sense of responsibility arose for all things. I used to be someone who cleared the forest in order to be a farmer. I would uproot trees and burn the forest in the winter. But when my mind came in contact with nature, a sense of responsibility and love for nature, trees and human beings arose.

Since then there has been 'fairness'.'

QUESTION: 'Things just changed forever on that day, is it?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Everything completely changed.

From knowing RUPA-NAMA, knowing nature and knowing convention, a sense of love for nature arose. I got interested in forests and because of that I am now surrounded by forest.

I see the value of nature. Trees are alive – you can almost talk to them!'

QUESTION: 'Do you mean that trees are in a way the same as oneself?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'That's what I mean. They are completely harmless. All things are born as friends without exception. We are all 'friends' in birth, old age, sickness and death.

From that day up to the present I have never harmed anybody or anything.

Even if someone abuses or kills me: never mind!'

QUESTION: 'You told me that your health was not good before but after you realized the DHAMMA it got better. How did the DHAMMA help you?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'I can see clearly that my good health is a result of understanding DHAMMA. When one understands DHAMMA one knows how to use one's life in the right way. I used to have trouble with my stomach. Now it is back to normal. I would like to say that if I didn't get to know the DHAMMA I would probably be dead now because I'm a very serious person. I want more than other people do. For example, others would harvest 50 bags of rice in a day but I have to make it 100 bags. I always wanted more than others and that made me ill and sick. If I hadn't come to the practice I would have been dead now! If I had used my life as I did before what would have become of me? This is one of the fruits of developing awareness and realizing the DHAMMA. The DHAMMA inevitably protects the body and mind, it keeps them safe and leads them towards freedom.'

QUESTION: 'Did you feel changes in your body?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'I could feel and see it all clearly. Not just health matters but also things deeper than that that I used to have and be. Those things disappeared. I don't serve the problems of the body anymore, I'm no longer a slave of the body; rather, I use the body as my servant. The mind is the same: before, I served the mind; now I use the mind. Before the mind used me! Things changed around. To give an example: heat, cold and hunger used to be powerful, defilements and craving were powerful, they would concoct a lot; but now they don't have any power at all. I use them. There is no problem with the body or the mind. I will remain like this, right here. No matter how many years, no matter what may happen to the world and society, I will abide right at this point. There won't be birth, no aging, no sickness, no heat, no cold, no hunger, no happiness and no suffering. I will be here, right here, where there is nothing to be, nothing to have.'

QUESTION: 'I have heard LOO-ANG POR TEE-AN say that a few minutes before death everybody will experience this same point (that you just described).

What is the meaning of that?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'There is a place. It is as if our bodies have a place, a home. When it rains do you stay outside, soaking?'

Where do you go? When it rains we have to avoid it and find a shelter. When it's hot do you go and sit in the blazing sun? The body won't agree to that. It wants to get out of there.

The mind of someone who has trained well in developing awareness is even more so.

When there is awareness, when one is aware, an inclination to get angry arises but anger doesn't arise; an inclination to suffer arises but suffering doesn't arise – the mind won't go for it. Whoever may try to make it angry: it won't go for it.

Even to have a tiny bit of suffering: it won't go for it. The mind lets go. The mind likes to abide right here. This is the way nature works. But if we don't train ourselves, it is the nature of the mind to run into suffering. The more anger the better.

It keeps thinking about it. But when we know, the mind won't go for it.'

QUESTION: 'This shows that the mind has returned to its original state, is that correct?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'It has returned to its original state, to its home, to its hide-out.

It won't go anywhere else.

When there is pain, the mind won't be in pain; when things arise, nothing arises in the mind; when things deteriorate, nothing happens in the mind.

This means: the mind won't go out and be these things.

When one is about to die, how can the mind agree to then die? Birth, aging, sickness and death are arts. If these things didn't exist, the DHAMMA would have no purpose.

This is what religion is all about. If one doesn't talk about these things it is not a matter of Buddhism. Therefore we should watch and see; let there be hunger, pain and birth – the mind is not any of it. The mind is beyond birth, aging and death.

It is not a matter of crying for help when we're about to die, 'Please take me to the hospital.' Rather look upon death as an art, an opportunity in life.

We don't surrender to suffering, we look beyond (lit. overlook) suffering. We don't surrender to anger: there is such a thing as non-anger.

It is safe to abide at this place; why would we let ourselves get trampled by suffering or anger? That which is beyond anger, happiness, suffering, birth, pain and death does exist! The DHAMMA is nature. The mind returns to nature, goes back home.

It is like being at home: we feel at ease, we are with those we know.

And so, with the DHAMMA we are perfect. There is nothing unfortunate, there is no inability to deal with things such as anger, pain and suffering. One is not a servant, one is free, one is safe. This is the way the DHAMMA is.

To go and practice at the monastery after anger has already arisen is not the right way to do it. Whenever it arises: cut it! And look at it. Look further. Don't give in to it. Look beyond the anger. Do it like this. You must build up awareness.

If we don't cultivate awareness, we won't have it.'

QUESTION: 'I know that you are by nature very refined in everything. Is that your original character or did it come about after your experience?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'For as long as I can remember I have never blamed myself for anything or had thoughts that made me remorseful. This is an old habit of mine. I have never created trouble for myself or others to the point of regret.

I still had suffering but not to the extent that I had problems with other people.

When I came to understand things I was able to smile.

So I am sure that I've lived my life in the right way or it might also be that my character has helped me too. I think that one has to create one's own environment, just to rely on effort and diligence is not enough. One should create coolness of mind, the ability not to suffer (easily). While practicing, feel that it doesn't matter whether or not you know it all yet.

Let the mind be contented. This is also an important point.

Just to be diligent in the walking and rhythmic meditation alone doesn't work. There are certain good things about me; my mind has always been cool. I've never argued with anybody, I am not impulsive. And so I can manage.

Actually, I used to have problems with myself but never mind:

because of suffering I put up a struggle, it was a lesson in unrelenting endurance to fight with suffering and hardship. My father died when I was a kid and I had to overcome obstacles and take on responsibilities. I struggled and economized, I restrained myself and kept cool. This is my background.

It would be good if you had some of these qualities too.

Don't be impulsive, don't be in a hurry, don't be flurried.

First think: 'Never mind!' Make this your base. Whether you gain or lose, whether it's right or wrong: Never mind! You still have a chance to deal with things, namely by living in the right way. Living in the right way doesn't mean to go and live in a monastery - you can live anywhere. Stay relaxed and equanimous: then there is no suffering.

This is the kind of person who is fit to realize the DHAMMA.

If the mind goes up and down and is not refined or gentle, it is not qualified.

This is another aspect of practicing DHAMMA.'

QUESTION: 'Does this (original) state of the mind already exist in all beings?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'It is the nature of everyone. If you don't get to this point it is not right, it is not finished, no matter what you may know or where you may be.

This state is nature, it is a treasure that belongs to all of us.

Right now, we are not one with nature, I don't know where we have gone off to.

Sometimes we feel lonely, sometimes we are worried.

This indicates that we are estranged from our real home which is the state of normality.

Whatever someone may say, we must know ourselves: we don't do anything unwholesome; we don't defile our minds. When the mind is free from harm it becomes pure by itself.

Others may or may not know about it but we know for ourselves.

We can guarantee that we won't harm anyone. But there is still the convention of speech.

I can still scold and reproach novices but the words are one thing and my mind is another.

I may tell somebody off but there is still loving-kindness in my mind.

The reproach is on a deeper level a kind of loving-kindness.

I scold, wishing well, not through a negative mind state.

It can even be lovely speech (PIYAVACA). It doesn't mean, 'So and so, I love you'.

That may not be lovely at all.

Rather, it is saying, 'So and so, don't do that, it is wrong'.

This is lovely speech. When something is wrong it has to be pointed out.'

QUESTION: 'All of us who have been born are alive just to reach this day.....'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Just that. Understand it like that. Don't get involved with things, it just makes a mess. It's better to know this when you're still young.

Don't let suffering punish you (for not knowing).

See suffering in order not to be caught up in it, see anger in order not to be caught in anger.

Don't stay with the anger, don't stay with the suffering.

A buffalo that falls in the mud knows how to get out but why do people not know how to get out of things when they get caught up? Why do they allow themselves to sink down for days on end? One should come out of impurity.

The more skilled one is, the more it becomes an art.

Then, it's easy not to be angry, not to do things – this is what a practitioner is like.

Even the body knows when fire touches it: it'll brush it off immediately.

But our minds don't know. When we don't know in time, our minds go for it, they run straight into suffering. For example, when we think that anger is a good thing, when we feel good abusing or killing somebody. The mood goes into the mind. It's like this chair:

I'm sitting in it and so nobody else can sit here.'

QUESTION: 'In reality, we have been wandering around in order to come back to our 'starting point', our origin. It's just that we need different amounts of time, isn't it?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'Yes, but those who don't know completely lose direction. They agree to be slaves to the whole thing. They let the defilements have tremendous power.

In reality, defilements are nothing! There is no self in them.

There is nothing powerful about them. When we know things as they are, the impurities line up to confess, no need to search for them. This makes us realize what convention is.

We see that this is the suffering of RUPA, this is the suffering of NAMA,

this is the disease of RUPA and of NAMA, the convention of RUPA and NAMA.

We are just the watcher and they come and show themselves.

When we have sharp eyes or wisdom-knowledge, insight-knowledge or awareness and wisdom (SATI-PANYA), we will see. I don't talk from the scriptures, I talk from nature.

I don't know what is written in the scriptures but I would like to say it like this:

'When you feel uncomfortable, you don't have to suffer; not getting what one wants doesn't have to be suffering'. You should view it like this.

Whatever the body is like, there doesn't have to be suffering.

Whatever feelings arise, there doesn't have to be suffering.

This is because we change their direction: we take suffering as a lesson rather than a punishment. When we examine it, we'll see it crystal clear.

We see it clearly from RUPA-NAMA to the suffering of RUPA and NAMA, to the disease of RUPA and NAMA.

'Seeing', here, doesn't mean knowing intellectually or having a view about it; it is a real discovery and the result is that conditions can no longer fool us. One has no more doubt, even if they arise a hundred or a thousand times.

We see their nature, we use nature to understand things.

We should be grateful for suffering and anger because we have been their servants since we were small; now that we see the disadvantages we 'return' these things to nature.'

QUESTION: 'After you had final knowledge, you helped villagers with their way of living, you were active preserving the forest and you went to teach meditation abroad.

Did L.P. TEE-AN support you in doing these things or did he want you to stay with him?'

LOO-ANG POR: 'He supported me. But the way I see it is that for those who go to the monastery there is no problem; as for those who are not yet thinking to go to the monastery: I see them from another angle.

The monastery where I stay (SUGATO forest monastery, Chaiapoom province) may be different from Wat Sanahm ny (the monastery where L.P.TEE-AN used to stay, close to Bangkok). Lots of people used to go to Sanahm ny monas-tery – that's good.

At Wat pah SUGATO I help the villagers. I established a center for children, because there was a need for it. At first I didn't teach DHAMMA because the people there didn't understand me. In order for them to understand me I had to live with them and prove myself. I found something to do; I can't be idle.

To just teach DHAMMA wouldn't reach them; I had to teach in another way.

I taught the villagers to plant trees and care for nature.

Sometimes I would help little children and poor people. Some people say that I should go and stay in Bangkok; why do I stay in a forest like this?

I think that there is no problem in Bangkok: people are already going to the monasteries. But what about those people who have no intention to go? It is necessary for them too (to come into contact with the DHAMMA). And so, I use my life in this way.'

QUESTION: 'It seems that it is more difficult where you are than in the city because you have to struggle with people's ignorance.'

LOO-ANG POR: 'It's very difficult, I have to fight with people's views. That's a heavy job and the results are few. But now it's a little better. The people in the area come from different places and backgrounds. Some had been in prison, some were refugees and were without a future. It's impossible to make people from other places love our country in the same way we do. Sometimes people would chase and kill each other like buffaloes.

In the past, the monastery was full of gamblers.

The first year I was there I would clean the meditation hall and collect a whole pile of whiskey bottles.

One part of my life is about looking after and preserving nature; nature has been destroyed so much already. We have to try to nurture and care for it.

I have to teach the villagers and make them understand.

They have to realize the importance of nature and the forests.

Another part of my life is to teach the DHAMMA, to teach meditation.'

