

A Dharma Gift

To Jack, Jacqueline, Joseph, and Sharon

20 September 2521 (Thai calendar - 1978 in the West)

Nat Pah Pong

One evening under his kuti at an informal meeting Luang Paw said "When you listen to the Dharma, you must open up your heart and compose yourself in the center. Don't try and accumulate what you hear, or make painstaking effort to retain it through your memory. Just let it flow into your heart as it reveals itself and keep yourself continually open to its flow in the present moment. What is ready to be retained will be so, and it will happen of its own accord, not through your forced effort. Similarly, when you expound the Dharma there must be no force involved. It must happen on its own as a spontaneous flow from the present moment and circumstances. You know, it's funny, but sometimes people come to me and really show no apparent wish to hear the Dharma and there it is, it just happens, out it comes with no effort whatsoever. Then other times people seem to be quite eager to listen. They even formally ask for a discourse and then, nothing! It just won't happen. What can you do? I don't know what it is but I know it happens in this way. It's like people have levels of receptive ability and when you are there at the same level it just happens.

The best thing you can do if you have to expound the Dharma is not to think about it, simply forget it. The more you think and try to plan the worse it will be. It's hard to do though, isn't it? Sometimes when you are flowing along smoothly, there will be a pause, and someone might ask a question, then all of the sudden there's a whole new flow. It's like an unlimited source that you can never exhaust.

I believe without a doubt about the Buddha's ability to know other being's temperament and receptive ability. He used the very same method of spontaneous teaching. It's not that he possessed any special superhuman power, but rather that he was sensitive to the needs of the people around him, and so he taught to them accordingly. To show you how spontaneous he was, once after he had expounded the Dharma to a group of his disciples, he asked them if they had ever heard this teaching before, they replied that they hadn't, he went on to say that he himself had never heard it either!

Just continue your practice no matter what you're doing. Practice is not depending on any one posture such as sitting or walking. Rather it is a continuous awareness of your flow of consciousness and feelings. No matter what is happening just compose yourself and be ever mindfully aware of that flow.

Practice is not moving forward, but there is forward movement, at the same time it is not moving back, but there is backward movement, and finally it is not stopping and standing still, but there is stopping and standing still, but you can't say that it is any one of the three. And then there is that place beyond practice where there is neither moving forward or backward nor is there stopping and standing still. What is that?

Luang Paw, Venerable Ahjahn Cha

*This was a spontaneous talk by Luang Paw. Since I've lived with and around him for the last eight years I've never known him to give anything other than spontaneous teachings. The strange thing for me about this particular one, is that as he talked I was applying it. The very next night in my walking meditation it came back to me so clearly and vividly that for the first time in my practice I was inspired to write his teaching down. So that as it flowed out of him, so it flowed out of me, and what I was ready to retain is now passed along to you.*