

The Dynamic Practices of Luangpor Teean A Thai Meditation Master

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The purpose of this paper is to briefly introduce the life and teachings of the Thai Buddhist monk Luangpor Teean. Luangpor Teean (1911-1988) was an important teacher within the world of Thai Buddhism who introduced a new technique of meditation that can be characterized as "dynamic" in contrast to the more conventional techniques of "static" meditation. He elucidated the goal of Buddhist practice with an unsurpassed vividness and authenticity. His dynamic meditation is also unique among the various schools of the contemporary Buddhist world.

Luangpor Teean's dynamic meditation is practiced by using rhythmic bodily movement to develop awareness (*sati*), an awareness that can encounter thoughts or mental images -- the root causes of human suffering. The teachings of Luangpor Teean indicate the way of developing awareness, which breaks through the chain of thoughts; once awareness has become the dominating power over thoughts and mental images, it simultaneously overcomes attraction, resistance, and delusion, and hence suffering.

The story of Luangpor Teean's life is of some interest in itself. He attained the Dhamma while he was a layman, which is very unusual (and for some hard to credit) in the monastically centered world of Thai Buddhism. His experience of Dhamma involved a sudden way of knowing, which is more common in the history of Ch'an Buddhism in China and Zen Buddhism in Japan^[1] In contemporary terms, Luangpor Teean can be seen as a teacher of "sudden enlightenment" in a Theravada context; from a historical perspective, his story is similar to that of Hui-neng (638-713), the sixth patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism in China, who also attained sudden enlightenment while a lay person.

His Life

The fifth child of Chin and Som Inthaphiu, Luangpor Teean was born on September 5, 1911, at Buhom, a small village in the remote province of Loei in the north eastern region of Thailand^[2] His given name was Phan. He had four brothers and one sister. Since his father died when he was still very young, the boy had to spend much of his time helping his mother with the hard work of running their farm.

There were no schools in the area, and Phan received no formal education. However, at the age of 10, he was ordained as a novice at the local monastery, where his uncle, Yakhuphong Chansuk, was a resident monk. Diligent, obedient, and devout, Phan spent eighteen months there studying ancient Buddhist scripts, meditation, and magic before he disrobed to return to his home. Later, following tradition, he was ordained as a monk at the age of 20, again studying and meditating with his uncle, this time for six months. His interest in meditation,

fuelled by a deep faith in the Buddha's teachings, continued to grow, and he practiced regularly.

About two years after returning to lay life Phan Inthaphiu married. He and his wife, Hom, had three sons: Niam, Teean, and Triam. After the eldest died at the age of 5, Phan became known as "Por Teean" (father of Teean) in accordance with the local tradition of calling a parent by the name of the eldest living child. To support his family, Por Teean worked hard on his farm and fruit plantation, as well as at a small trade in the village. In his community, Por Teean was a leader in Buddhist activities, providing food, robes, and medicine for the monks, as well as organizing construction projects at local monasteries. Scrupulously honest, he was very highly respected and was persuaded on three different occasions to become the head of his village.

Later he moved to Chiangkhan, a larger community in the same province, where he became a successful trader, sailing in his own boat along the Mekhong River between Thailand and Laos. During these years he met various meditation teachers and practiced the methods they taught him, and his enthusiasm for pursuing Dhamma continued to strengthen. By the time he had reached his mid-40s, however, he came to the realization that his many years of making merit, avoiding "sin", and practicing meditation had not liberated him from anger, and so he decided that it was time for him to commit himself fully to seeking the Dhamma. And so, at the age of 46, after arranging for his wife's well being and economic security and settling his business affairs, Por Teean left his home, firmly determined not to return unless he found the true Dhamma.

Embarking on his search, Por Teean travelled to Wat Rangsimukdaram, in Nongkhai province, where he decided to spend the rapidly approaching three-month monastic retreat (*phansa*). There he met Achan^[3] Pan, a Laotian meditation teacher who taught him a form of body-moving meditation, where each movement and the pause at the end of that movement was accompanied by the silent recitation of the words "moving-stopping." Achan Pan had decided to spend that retreat in Laos; therefore, he left another monk, Luangpho Wanthong, in charge of the monastery.

On the 8th day of the waxing moon of the eighth month of the Thai lunar calendar, in the year 2500 of the Buddhist Era, Luangpho Wanthong directed all the meditators staying for that retreat (which would begin on the first day of the waning moon of that month) to practice awareness of death by concentrating on their breathing and inwardly repeating the word "death" each time they inhaled or exhaled. In trying to do this, Por Teean found himself at first diligent but then unmotivated. After having practiced many forms of meditation over the preceding thirty-five years -- all involving concentration on breathing and also in most cases an inner recitation -- he had only obtained transitory calmness. He, therefore, decided to abandon such techniques and instead to only practice the recently acquired body-moving meditation, but without the inner recitations. This he did throughout the whole of the following day, practicing in accord with nature, remaining energetic and at ease.

On the third day of his practice at Wat Rangsimukdaram at around 5 a.m., while he was sitting and moving his arms in meditation, a scorpion and its young fell onto Por Teean's thigh and then scurried all over his lap and finally onto the floor. To his surprise he felt neither startled nor fearful^[4] At that moment a sudden knowledge occurred in his mind: instead of experiencing himself as he always had, he now saw *rupa-nama* (body-mind); he saw it acting, and he saw its disease. Furthermore, at that point he knew clearly that *rupa-nama* was *dukkham-aniccam-anatta* (unbearable-unstable-uncontrollable); by seeing with insight he also knew clearly the difference between actuality and supposition. Knowing *rupa-nama*, his understanding of "religion," "Buddhism," "sin," and "merit" changed completely. After a while all the young scorpions returned to their mother's back, and Por Teean used a stick to carry them away to a safe place.

At this point, his mind was carried away by a flood of emotions and thought, but eventually he returned to his practice, taking note of the body's movements. His mind soon returned to normal. By evening Por Teean's awareness was sufficiently continuous and fast that he began to "see", rather than merely know, thought; thought was "seen" as soon as it arose, and it immediately stopped. Soon, practicing in this way, he penetrated to the source of thought and realization arose. His mind changed fundamentally. Por Teean was now independent of both scriptures and teachers.

As he continued to practice that day, his mind was changed step by step. In later years, much of his teaching would be concerned with the details of the steps and stages through which the mind progressed on its way to the ending of suffering^[5]

Later that evening a deeper realization arose, and his mind changed for the second time. Early the next morning, the 11th day of the waxing moon (July 8, 1957), as he walked in meditation, his realization went even deeper, and his mind changed for the third time. Soon afterwards the state of arising-extinction was realized; and with that all of Por Teean's human conditioning and limitations dissolved and lost their taste: body-mind returned to its "original" state.

A few days later Achan Pan arrived from Laos on a short visit in order to examine the progress of the meditators. Por Teean was the last person to be interviewed. When asked what he knew, Por Teean said that he knew himself. Asked how he knew himself, he answered that in moving, sitting, and lying he knew himself. Achan Pan commented that in that case only dead people did not know themselves. Por Teean replied that he had already died and had been born anew.

"I have died to filth, wickedness, sorrow, darkness, and drowsiness, but I am still alive," he explained.

Achan Pan then asked him whether salt is salty. "Salt is not salty," Por Teean replied.

"Why?"

"Salt is not on my tongue, so how can it be salty." Achan Pan then asked whether chilli is hot and sugar cane sweet. Por Teean responded in a similar way to each of these questions. Achan Pan went on to ask: "Among the black colors, which one is more black?"

"Black is black, no black can be beyond black; white is white, no white is beyond white; the same is true for red and every other thing-nothing is beyond itself," Por Teean answered.

Achan Pan was silent for a long time. Then he spoke again, "Suppose here is a forest, and a person came to see me, and then walked back home. On the way back home he carried a gun, and coming upon a tiger he shot it. Being wounded, the tiger became very fierce. If I had asked that person to tell you to come and see me here, would you come?" Achan Pan used a story to pose a profound question.

"Yes, I would. Being asked by you, I would come. If I did not come, it would be disrespectful to you," Por Teean answered.

"If you come, the tiger will bite you."

"Eh, I do not see the tiger."

"Will you come along the path or use a short-cut?" Achan Pan asked.

"I will not use a short-cut. I will use the path. When I walk on the path and the tiger comes, I can see it and avoid it. If I do not walk on the path and the tiger comes, I cannot see it, and therefore cannot avoid it," Por Teean replied. ^[6]

After this, Achan Pan had nothing more to say. Por Teean continued to train himself until the end of the retreat in October, and then he returned home. There he taught his wife to practice the dynamic meditation he had just discovered during the retreat. Respecting him very highly, she followed the practice strictly, and after two years she came to know the Dhamma. It was late morning while she was picking vegetables in the garden when she exclaimed, "What has happened to me?"

"What?" Por Teean asked her.

"My body has lost all its 'taste'! It shrank like beef being salted!"

Por Teean told her not to do anything with it, but to let it be; afterwards she told him that she no longer experienced suffering.

He taught Pa Nom and Lung Nom, his sister and brother-in-law, to practice dynamic meditation until they both knew the Dhamma. He also taught other relatives, neighbors, friends, and fellow villagers to practice dynamic meditation. Because of their respect for him, they followed the practice, many obtaining deep results. It was as a layman that Por Teean held his first meditation retreat open to the public at Buhom for ten days. He spent his own money to feed the thirty to forty people who attended. Thereafter, he devoted all his

energy and wealth to teaching people. In a short time he built two meditation centers in Buhom, as well as centers in a nearby village.

Since he felt a responsibility to teach what he called the Dhamma of "an instant" to as wide a circle as possible, after two years and eight months as a lay teacher, Por Teean entered the monkhood, at the age of 48, in order to be in a better position to teach. On February 3, 1960, he was ordained a monk at Wat Srikhunmuang in his hometown by a senior monk named Vijitdhammacariya. At his ordination he was given the Pali name "Cittasubho" (the brilliant mind), but people usually called him "Luangpor Teean" (Venerable Father Teean). He was known by that name throughout the rest of his life.

As a monk, Luangpor Teean taught dynamic meditation to monks and lay people in his hometown for over a year. He then moved to Chiangkhan and built two meditation centers there at Wat Santivanaram and Wat Phonchai. He also crossed the border to Laos and built a meditation center there as well. Because he taught Buddhism outside of the scriptures and traditions, Luangpor Teean was once mistakenly accused of being a communist monk during the anti-communist atmosphere of the 1960s. A young, high-ranking policeman, having a strong anti-communist sentiment, came as a monk to spy on Luangpor Teean. Luangpor Teean taught him how to practice meditation. After, meditating for some time, he began to know the Dhamma. He then paid homage to Luangpor Teean and confessed to him about his earlier purpose. Afterwards the false rumors and accusations about Luangpor Teean gradually ended.

Luangpor Teean devoted the rest of his life to single-mindedly teaching Dhamma practice. He worked constantly, ate little, rested little, and eschewed all diversions and distractions. Having found Dhamma, and having found it so close at hand, he was fiercely determined to do his utmost to point the way for others to follow.

As the founder of dynamic meditation, the unique method for the developing of awareness through bodily movements, Luangpor Teean's reputation spread in the Northeast. He built major meditation centers at Wat Paphutthayan outside of the town of Loei in 1966 and Wat Mookhavanaram outside the town of Khonkaen in 1971. He also travelled to Laos and taught dynamic meditation there from 1961 to 1963, and once again in 1974 when he stayed and taught in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. As more and more people practiced under his guidance, a number of monks came to be in a position to teach in their own right and helped Luangpor Teean by teaching at the various meditation centers he had founded. Among them were Achan Khamkhian Suvanno and Achan Da Sammakhato.

A former "witch doctor" from the northeastern part of Thailand, Achan Khamkhian, at the age of 30, went to see Luangpor Teean at Wat Paphutthayan in early 1966. After a month of practice under Luangpor Teean's guidance, he knew *rupa-nama* (body-mind) and overcame his own witchcraft and superstition. Then he decided to be ordained as a monk and continued his practice under Luangpor Teean at Wat Paphutthayan. After three years of practice he "returned to the primordial nature" and has become a dynamic meditation teacher. He established a meditation center at Wat Pasukhato in Chaiyabhum province where he has taught people dynamic meditation, campaigned to help poor people in the rural areas, and worked to preserve the environment.

After practicing many forms of meditation without any real result, Achan Da, a monk from the Northeast, heard about the teachings of Luangpor Teean and after a long search he finally met Luangpor Teean and practiced under his guidance. It took Achan Da only three days to know *rupa-nama* (body-mind). He then progressed rapidly toward the end of suffering and has become a dynamic meditation teacher. He has taught at Wat Mokkhanaram as an abbot of this meditation center.

In 1975, Luangpor Teean was invited to teach meditation at Wat Chonlaprathan in Nonthaburi, a province adjoining Bangkok. As an illiterate monk from the countryside, he was of little interest to the people from Bangkok who often visited this well-known monastery. However, a scholar monk named Kovit Khemananda, whose talks attracted many intellectuals and students, was also teaching at Wat Chonlaprathan at that time and was puzzled by some of Luangpor Teean's words and actions. Eventually Khemananda came to recognize his great enlightening wisdom. After his "discovery" by Khemananda, Luangpor Teean became a figure of interest to intellectuals and students in Bangkok and throughout the country.

In late 1976, Luangpor Teean founded a meditation center, Wat Sanamnai, on the outskirts of Bangkok, and from this central location he accepted many invitations to give talks and teach dynamic meditation at universities, hospitals, schools, and Buddhist clubs at various institutions, including government departments and ministries. In 1986, Luangpor Teean resigned from all administrative works and let Achan Thong (or in his Pali name, "Abhakaro"), an ordained disciple from Udonthani, to be the abbot of Wat Sanamnai. Born in 1939, Achan Thong was raised in northeastern Thailand mostly by his mother, since his father died when he was only 7 years old. Following tradition, he was ordained at the age of 22. He met Luangpor Teean at Buhom in 1968 and asked for an intensive meditation retreat under his guidance where he could remain in a small cottage without there being any obligation towards the normal monastic activities. His request was granted by Luangpor Teean. Later on, this sort of arrangement became a regular practice during Luangpor Teean's meditation retreats.

All the while, Luangpor Teean continued his teaching in the provinces. As his reputation grew, his teaching was increasingly spread by pamphlets, books, and audiocassettes. He also went to the south and taught people at Hatyai, where a meditation center, Suan Thammsakon, was built for the practice of dynamic meditation.

Luangpor Teean went to Singapore twice in 1982 on the invitation of a Buddhist group there. His first visit to Singapore, June 8-24, marked a historical event when he met Yamada Roshi, a Zen master from Japan.^[7] This meeting of the two teachers raised the question of what "sudden enlightenment" really was in the contemporary context and what was the authentic method leading to that "sudden enlightenment." While Yamada Roshi emphasized concentration and the silent recitation of a koan (dhamma riddle), Luangpor Teean emphasized awareness (without either concentration or recitation) through bodily movement and the "seeing" of thought. Yamada Roshi guided his students to attain step-by-step satori (sudden enlightenment) by breaking through a series of koans recorded in the *Mumonkan*^[8].

In this tradition, if a person cannot finish all the koans within this lifetime, they can be worked on in the next life until final "satori" is attained. Luangpor Teean, on the other hand, guided his students step by step through the "object of practice"^[9] without referring to any scriptures or historical records. He insisted that people should diligently develop awareness until they realize the state of arising-extinction, the final sudden enlightenment, within this lifetime. Unlike many teachers within the various Buddhist traditions he never mentioned anything about the life after. The method of concentration and the silent recitation of a koan is quite different from the method of developing awareness through bodily movement. The content of a series of koans is also quite different from the content in the "object of practice" in dynamic meditation.

On his second visit to Singapore, October 16-31, Luangpor Teean taught and guided a dynamic meditation retreat for interested people there. During both visits, Luangpor Teean was sick and needed medical treatment in a hospital -- a sign that later revealed a more serious, threatening illness.

In late 1985 Luangpor Teean gained an important female disciple, Anchalee Thaiyanond, a middle-aged Bangkok woman with two daughters. Unlike many other women at her age in Thai culture, Anchalee was never interested in religion, merit making, or keeping the precepts. She happened to read some of Luangpor Teean's books and had faith in his teachings. She went to see him and practiced at home frequently seeking his guidance by visiting him at Wat Sanamnai. She attained the Dhamma in her daily life in the busy city of Bangkok and became a female successor to Luangpor Teean.

Luangpor Teean had been in poor health for some time when in mid-1983 he was diagnosed as suffering from cancer (malignant lymphoma). Despite extensive major surgery in 1983 and again in 1986, and despite repeated courses of radiation therapy and chemotherapy, Luangpor Teean was able to achieve an extraordinary amount of work in his last five years, giving considerable energy to providing personal guidance, giving public talks, and leading meditation retreats. He built his final meditation center at Thapmingkhwan in the town of Loei in 1983 and added Ko Phutthatham, a large nearby area, to it in 1986. He taught actively and incisively until the disease reached its advanced stages.

When he realized that the end was near, Luangpor Teean discharged himself from the hospital and returned to Ko Phutthatham in Loei province. Late in the afternoon on his fifth day back in Loei he announced that he was now going to die: He then turned his awareness completely inward; his wasted body which had been so stiff and brittle, became fully relaxed and fluid; and fully aware, unattached, holding to nothing, not even the breath, an hour later (at 6:15 p.m. on September 13, 1988) his breathing ceased like a tree coming to rest as the wind that moved it fades completely away.^[10]

His Teachings

Luangpor Teean's dynamic meditation incorporates rhythmic bodily movements as a way to stimulate and develop awareness (*sati*). This practice is regarded as a way through which the body (*rupa* or form) and the awareness of it (*nama* or mind) are harmonized. The harmony between the body and the awareness of the body is, according to Luangpor Teean's teachings, the very first result and the first step on the path to "seeing" thought.

Usually a human being collects a lot of mental images in daily activities, and these images reflect themselves in the process of thinking. With the dynamic meditation of bodily movement, according to Luangpor Teean, the awareness becomes active and clear, and as a natural consequence it encounters the process of thinking and sees thought clearly. For Luangpor Teean, thought is the source of both human activity and human suffering.

In Luangpor Teean's teachings, thought and awareness are two basic elements in a human being. When awareness is weak, thought drags us away to the past and the future, forming a strong chain. At any moment when awareness is strong, the chain of thought is immediately broken. In dynamic meditation, the practitioner seeks to stimulate, develop, and strengthen awareness to see thought and break its bonds.

For Luangpor Teean, thought is the root of greed, anger, and delusion – the three defilements of a human being.^[11] In order to overcome greed, anger, and delusion, Luangpor Teean suggested that we cannot simply suppress them by keeping precepts or an established discipline, nor can we suppress them by maintaining calmness through some form of meditation based on concentration. Though these activities are useful to some extent, we need to go to the root of the defilements: to let the awareness see thought and break through the chain of thought or, in other words, go against the stream of thought. In this way we know and see the true nature of thought.

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Luangpor Teean often warned practitioners that it is very important in meditation that we do not suppress thought by any kind of calmness or tranquility. If we do, though we might find some happiness, we will be unable to see the nature of thought. Rather, he taught that we should let thought flow freely and let our awareness know and perceive it clearly. The clear awareness will naturally go against the stream of thought by itself; all that we have to do is properly set up the mind and strengthen awareness through rhythmic bodily movements, one movement at a time.

Through dynamic meditation, the awareness that arises from bodily movement sees and breaks through the chain of thought resulting in the detachment of the inner six senses from outer objects.^[12] Detachment is **not** a deliberate attitude nor a conscious way of practice, but rather it is the result of a right form of practice. When awareness breaks through the chain

of thought, thought loses its dominating power; awareness becomes the dominating power over thought, over the three defilements, greed, anger, and delusion, and hence over suffering. The practice of Luangpor Teean's dynamic meditation results in the arising of *nanapanna* (the knowledge that comes from the accumulation of direct knowing):

Any time that thought arises we know it, even while sleeping. When we move our body while sleeping we also know it. This is because our awareness is complete. When we see thought all the time, no matter what it thinks, we conquer it every time. Those **who** can see thought are near the current (flowing) to *nibbana* (the extinction of suffering). Then we will come to a point where something inside will arise suddenly. If the thought is quick, *panna* will also be quick. If the thought or emotion is very deep, *panna* will also be very deep. And if these two things are equally deep and collide, then there is the sudden breaking-out of a state that is latent in everybody. With this occurrence the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are detached from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects. It is like uncoupling the drive mechanism of a car. When the parts become independent of each other, the car, although it still exists, can no longer be driven. (Luangpor Teean 1984: 6-7)

Luangpor Teean summarized the "object of practice" in dynamic meditation as follows:

Stage 1: Suppositional object

Rupa-nama (body-mind)

Rupa-acting-nama-acting, rupa-disease-nama-disease

Dukkham-aniccam-anatta (unbearable-unstable-uncontrollable)

Sammati (supposition)

Sasana ("religion"), *Buddhasasana* ("Buddhism")

Papa ("sin"), *punna* ("merit")

Stage 2: Touchable object

Vatthu-paramattha-akara (thingness-touchable-changingness)

Dosa-moha-lobha (anger-delusion-greed)

Vedana-sanna-sankhara-vinnana

(Feeling-memory/percept-conceiving-knowingness)

Kilesa-tanha-upadana-kamma^[13]
(Stickiness-heaviness-attachment-action)

Sila (normality)
Silakhandha-samadhikhandha-pannakhandha
(Container of normality-setting up the mind-knowing)

Samatha (concentration) and *vipassana* (insight) types of calmness

Kamasava-bhavasava-avijjasava
(The taint of “sensuality”, being, not-knowing)

The results of a bad bodily, verbal, and mental actions, and their combination;

The results of a good bodily, verbal, and mental actions, and their combination;

The state of *koet-dap* (arising-extinction).

The “object of practice” in dynamic meditation is a series of experiences by which the mind progresses step by step towards the end of suffering. These experiences are those – inner as well as physical – discovered by Luangpor Teean. They now serve as guideposts for the practitioners of dynamic meditation.

During the first stage of dynamic meditation, the suppositional object, one is supposed to know *rupa-nama*, its acting and its disease. *Rupa-nama* is known when the body (*rupa*) and the awareness of the body (*nama*) are harmonized. Then each movement is the movement of *rupa-nama* (body-mind). Luangpor Teean explained that for a disease of the body, one needs medical care from a doctor or a hospital. For the diseases of the mind, whose symptoms are distress, frustration, anger, greed delusion, and so on, one needs awareness and a method to stimulate and develop awareness. In practicing dynamic meditation, the mind comes to know the *rupa-nama* characteristics of *dukkham-aniccam-anatta*.

At this point in the practice, one is supposed to know the distinction between supposition (*sammatti*) and actuality. One is supposed to know the actual meanings of phenomena “religion”, “Buddhism”, “sin”, and “merit”. In the suppositional world, they have many different meanings, interpreted by scholars and religious people. But in actuality, they all point to the immediate experience of awareness. Luangpor Teean explained that “religion” is every one of us without exception who has a body and the consciousness of the body. “Buddhism” is the awareness leading to insightful wisdom and the cessation of psychological suffering. “Sin” is the state of lacking awareness, hence it is full of suffering. And “merit” is the state of awareness that releases suffering. Knowing the suppositional object, one is free from all kinds of superstition.

In the second stage, the touchable object, a practitioner is taught to be attentive to the process of the awareness seeing thought. The well-developed awareness naturally encounters and sees thought, as a cat seeing a rat immediately pounces upon it. In seeing

thought, a person is supposed to see *vatthu-paramattha-akara*. For Luangpor Teean, *vatthu* means anything that exists inside or outside of the mind. *Paramattha* means the touching of things with the mind. *Akara* means the flux witnessed by the mind. Then, in continuing the practice of dynamic meditation, the mind progresses to see “anger-delusion-greed”, and *vedana-sanna-sankhara-vinnana*.

Now, in the continuous practice, one is supposed to see *kilesa-tanha-upadana-kamma*. Luangpor Teean metaphorically characterized the experience of seeing these phenomena as at least a 60% reduction in the weight of the psychologically oppressive burden he bore before beginning his practice. Then the mind progresses to see first *sila*, and then *silakhandha-samadhikhandha-panna-khandha*. At this point, the distinction between *samatha* and *vipassana* types of calmness is realized. According to Luangpor Teean, the calmness of *samatha* suppresses thought, so it is temporary and unnatural – it is a deluded calm that is not truly calm. On the other hand, the calmness of *vipassana* is beyond thought and exists all the time – it is calmness that is full of awareness and insight. The mind then progresses to see *kamasava-bhavasava-avijjasava*, and their combinations, and good bodily, verbal and mental actions, and their combinations.

At this point, one sees the state of *koet-dap* in which the inner six senses detach themselves from outer objects. Luangpor Teean characterized this as being like a rope that, after having been tautly drawn between two posts, is cut in two in the middle. It is not possible to tie the rope together again so long as its two parts remain tied to the posts. The state of *koet-dap* is the end of suffering and the final goal of the practice.

Luangpor Teean in the Thai Theravada context

In contemporary Thai Buddhism, there are a number of traditions and teachers who have taught various methods of Buddhist practice. Some emphasize the acquiring of *panna* (wisdom) and the study of the Pali Canon, the Tipitaka. Others emphasize the keeping of *sila* (“precepts”) and ethical purity. Still others emphasize the practice of *samadhi* (“meditation”). *Panna, sila*, and *samadhi* are the three basic components of Theravada Buddhism’s teachings.^[14]

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu represents the *panna* aspect of the Thai Theravada tradition.^[15] He, as a great reformist monk in contemporary Thai Buddhism, has rationalized and internalized the teachings from the Tipitaka and Thai Theravada culture as a whole. In elevating oneself towards *nibbana* (cessation of suffering), a practitioner acquires *panna* through studying the scriptures, reading and listening to the Dhamma teachings, observing nature (“Dhamma is nature, nature is Dhamma”), living a properly conducted life, as well as practicing *anapanasati* (awareness of breathing). *Anapanasati* is a meditation technique referred to in the Pali Canon; it concentrates on the various ways of breathing (*samatha*) and, in later stages, uses concentration to contemplate the nature of things (*vipassana*).

Phra Bodhiraksa and his Santi Asoka movement represent the ethical dimension of contemporary Thai Buddhism. Judging from his standards, most monks within the Thai Sangha (or community of monks) are far below the level of purity of the *sila* set by the

Buddha. Phra Bodhiraksa criticizes the lax behaviour, superstitions, and materialism of most monks and the self-indulgence, corruption, and violence of Thai society. He puts the reformist rationality into practice on the institutional and organizational level by announcing independence from the Thai clerical hierarchy, which makes his movement radical within the Thai Sangha. He and his followers observe a very strict *vinaya* (discipline) by being vegetarian, eating only one meal a day, wearing no shoes, and living a very simple life. For Phra Bodhiraksa, *sila* and ethical purity are central on the path towards enlightenment.

There are at least three main traditions that represent the *samadhi* aspect of contemporary Thai Theravada Buddhism: Achan Man's tradition, the *Yup-no Phong-no* tradition, and the Dhammakaya movement.

Achan Man and his lineage, including Achan Cha, have been regarded as one of the strongest meditation traditions among the forest monasteries (*arannavasi*) in Northeastern Thailand.^[16] They observe, with the exception of Achan Cha, a very strict traditional Dhammayutika discipline.^[17] Their form of meditation is to concentrate on the breathing and to silently recite the word *buddho* (Buddha) each time they inhale or exhale. In deep concentration, on the path to *nibbana*, a practitioner may encounter gods (*deva*) and other forms of supernatural beings. Achan Man's tradition represents "traditional orthodoxy" within the Thai Theravada Buddhism.

The Yup-no Phong-no (falling-rising) tradition originally derived from a Burmese form of meditation. It has some traditional links with the contemporary Srisayadaw movement in Myanmar. This Burmese form of meditation emphasizes concentration on the falling and rising of the abdomen, while breathing out and breathing in, with the silent recitation of the words *yup-no* (falling) and *phong-no* (rising) respectively. A practitioner may use this well-trained concentration to contemplate a corpse or to "see through" a beautiful body as a composite of skin, flesh, blood vessels, organs, and skeleton to realize the impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature of a human being.

Some suggest that the Dhammakaya movement may represent the emergence of the new middle-class in modern Thai society.^[18] It uses mass-marketing and sophisticated media techniques to propagate its movement. It allows lay followers to use the practice traditionally attributed to the forest monks. Dhammakaya reduces the traditional Buddhist cosmology, with its goal of *nibbana*, to a location within the body. Its technique of meditation is to visualize and concentrate on a crystal ball two inches above the naval, which is regarded as the "center" of the body. Their meditation is accompanied by the silent recitation of the phrase *samma-araham* (one who is free from defilements). Later on, a practitioner may attempt to visualize a crystal Buddha image. In the final stages, the practitioner may literally see the Buddha and *nibbana* at the "center" of his or her own body.

Luangpor Teean's dynamic meditation has nothing directly to do with the scriptures. It has nothing to do with contemplation on the nature of things, on a composite of repulsive elements. It does not emphasize the keeping of precepts, although the keeping of precepts is good – socially good. It has nothing to do with concentration, silent recitation, or

visualization. Dynamic meditation is a method of bodily movement involving the raising of arms or walking, one movement at a time, to stimulate and develop awareness, and to let awareness “see” thought – the root cause of human defilements – and break the chain of thought. From these basic differences it can be seen that Luangpor Teean’s teachings are quite distinct from the teachings of other traditions and teachers in contemporary Thai Theravada Buddhism.

Conclusion

Luangpor Teean’s teachings and his dynamic meditation are a new phenomenon not only in the Thai Theravada tradition but also in contemporary Buddhism and meditation. Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Kampuchea, represents a more conservative trend in Buddhism. It has been trying to preserve, in the long history of its own tradition, the Buddha’s teachings, the monastic life, and the early traditions, without any significant change. By going back to the original sources of Buddhism whenever necessary, witnessed in many Great Buddhist Councils throughout its history, it has tried to “purify” the religion

Theravada Buddhism has emphasized the keeping of the *sila* (precepts), the practice of the *samatha* (concentration) and *vipassana* (contemplation on the nature of things) forms of meditation, and the study of the Pali Canon. In keeping the *sila*, a person aims to have bodily control over greed, anger, and delusion; in practicing the *samatha* form of meditation, a person aims to purify the mind; and in practicing the *vipassana* form of meditation and studying the Canon, a person aims to gain wisdom.

Luangpor Teean’s dynamic meditation has little to do with traditional Theravada practices. The rhythmic bodily movements of dynamic meditation directly stimulate and develop awareness (*sati*), which, in due course, encounters and sees thought and breaks through the chain of thought – the root cause of greed, anger, and delusion. When awareness has become the dominating power over thought, true *sila* appears; it is *sila* that “observes” a human being, rather than a human being “observing” *sila*. When awareness has become the dominating power over thought, true *samadhi* (the quiet mind that sees a thought and the extinction of a thought, or sees a thing directly as it is outside of thought) and *panna* (knowledge from this direct “seeing”) appear. Silent recitation in concentration; contemplation of a corpse; contemplation on the impermanence, suffering, and void nature of things; and reading of the scriptures are all one form or another of thought.

Mahayana Buddhism, including Ch’an (Zen) and Vajrayana, in the Far East represents a more liberal trend in Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism has had the flexibility to adjust itself to the indigenous cultures of Bhutan, China (including Tibet), Mongolia, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam and the openness to add new ideas to its doctrines. It has emphasized the idea of *bodhisattva* (“one who embraces self-sacrifice for the welfare of others”). From a theoretical point of view, Mahayana doctrines are quite different from those of Theravada Buddhism. But from a practical viewpoint, they are quite similar.

Besides placing emphasis on different *suttas* (the discourses of the Buddha) and some different ideas about keeping the precepts, contemporary Mahayana meditation, be it Ch'an (Zen) or Vajrayana, is essentially the same as Theravada meditation: involving the concentration of the mind. In Ch'an (Zen) meditation, the practitioner is taught to concentrate on a koan. The specific practice is the silent recitation of the koan. In Vajrayana meditation, visualization of religious images, sometimes together with the recitation of a mantra, plays an important role. The visualization of a mental image is, however, another form of thought.

The teachings of Luangpor Teean and his dynamic meditation are unique in the contemporary world of meditation. His meditation technique is not a form of concentration, visualization, or mental recitation; rather it is a way of developing awareness so that the mind directly encounters, sees, and breaks through thought. Accordingly, once a human being has gone beyond the confines of thought, psychological suffering ceases to exist.

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- [1] The Chinese word *ch'an* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word *dhyana* "meditation", which is the etymological source for the Pali word for meditation, *jhana*. The Japanese word *Zen* is the Sino-Japanese reading for *ch'an*. I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to Louis Mangione who helped clarify the sources and the meanings of these technical terms as well as working with me on improving my English throughout this article.
- [2] For certain proper names, the author is following his own conventions that have appeared in previous publications (also see titles in the bibliography). For other terms, the Library of Congress system of Romanization has been followed. While the LC system has not been used for proper names, according to it "Por Teean" would be rendered Pho Thian -- editor.
- [3] The Thai word *Achan* means "teacher". It is a title for a dhamma teacher as well as an academic teacher.
- [4] Por Teean's development of awareness had reached the point where his body (*rupa*) and his awareness of the body (*nama*) were harmonized. At this point, the *rupa-nama* (body-mind) would be known to any practitioner. See a fuller explanation of *rupa-nama* in the second part of this article -- His Teachings.
- [5] The explanation of these steps and stages is presented in the second part of this article -- His Teachings.
- [6] In Theravada Buddhist meditation as in many other forms of Buddhism, there is a tradition of testing monks through interviews. Por Teean answered Achan Pan's questions and riddles by referring to the present moment in the harmony of body-mind where awareness is the dominant power over thought. Salt is salty only when it is on one's tongue at the present moment, otherwise there is just the concept (or thought) that salt has a salty quality. Concerning the riddle of the tiger, Por Teean chose to walk on the path of awareness; when the tiger (representing thought) came, he could see it immediately and it would not harm him.
- [7] Chusri Rungrotchanarak and I served as Luangpor Teean's interpreters during his first visit to Singapore when he met Yamada Roshi. Both teachers were invited to teach in the same Buddhist center at the same time.
- [8] The Japanese word *mumonkan* is the Sino-Japanese reading for the Chinese word *wu-men-kuan* 'the gateless gate.' It is a historical record of koan used in zazen (Zen sitting meditation) within the *Rinzai* Zen tradition.
- [9] See the second part in this article -- His Teachings.

- [10] I wish to thank Phra Charles Nirodho, who practiced under Luangpor Teean since 1980 and stayed with him in his final days, for helping me revise this biography and especially for his personal account of Luangpor Teean's final minutes.
- [11] In the Theravada tradition it is very common to list these three defilements together when describing the human condition of the common man or woman.
- [12] In Buddhism, the inner six senses are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Their counterparts, the outer six objects, are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and perceiving mental objects.
- [13] Luangpor Teean freely used Pali terms to name the experiences from his practice of dynamic meditation. Most of them have more or less the same meaning as the standard translations of Pali. However, a number of them, such as *kilesa* (“stickiness”) and *tanha* (“heaviness”) were used more freely by him. According to the standard translations, *kilesa* means “defilements”, whereas *tanha* means “lust” or “passion”.
- [14] See Grant A. Olson, “A Person-Centered Ethnography of Thai Buddhism: The Life of Phra Rajavaramuni (Orayudh Payutto)” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1989), 353-377.
- [15] To maximize understanding among Buddhists and scholars from diverse linguistic backgrounds, I have chosen Pali transliterations of Thai names into English. Thus, the Pali transliterations yield such names as Buddhadasa, Bodhiraksa, Santi Asoka, Dhammakaya, Mahanikaya, and Dhammayutika, whereas the Thai transliterations would give us Phutthathat, Phothisak, Santi Asok, Thammakai, Mahanikai, and Thammayut.
- [16] In the Thai Theravada tradition, there are two kinds of monasteries: town monasteries (*gamavasi*) and forest monasteries (*arannavasi*). Town monasteries are more concerned with study (*ganthadhura*) whereas forest monasteries emphasize more the practice of meditation (*vipassanadhura*).
- [17] There are two main sects or orders (*nikaya*), based on disciplinary interpretation, within the Thai Sangha: Mahanikaya and Dhammayutika. Mahanikaya is the original form rooted in the long history of Thai Buddhism. The majority of monks in Thailand belong to this sect. Dhammayutika is the reformed sect, with its strict discipline, initiated by King Mongkut (Rama IV). It represents royal interests within the Thai Sangha.
- [18] See Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), esp. 32-36, 205-206; Edwin Zehner, “Reform of a Thai Middle-Class Sect: The growth and Appeal of the Thammakai Movement”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21:2, 402-426.