

REFLECTION ON MY TIME AT ABERDEEN TEMPLE

Some weeks ago, Monk Sujana asked me to write about my experience from coming to the temple in Hamilton place in 2012 to the present time in Constitution street 2015. However I would like to start this journey from 21 Dec 2004, I flew over to Bangkok to meet my girlfriend, who three years later, in 2007, we got married on the 26 of October. On my visit, my initial plan was to spend a couple of days in Bangkok, then fly to Phuket, Southern Thailand for Christmas and New Year, which I told my family and friends. However, spending time with my girlfriend, I changed my mind and asked her if we could go to her home town in north-east Thailand. When, we arrived in Sakorn-nakhorn, it was a Christmas eve, and booked into the Dusit hotel. In the hotel, I noticed pictures of temples of that area. Those pictures looked serene and very calming. I spoke to the manager-ness, called FIAT for basic information of those temples. On our request, he arranged a man called Shopachok, who could take us to those places. So, we were arranged to be taken to these places for a week on a daily basis.

On the 26 December 2004, unfortunately, the Tsunami disaster happened. I watched that disaster on horror on the television in the hotel lounge. We, nevertheless, continued on our plan to visit temples. I was intrigued by the temples that I have visited and the monks, whom I met. On my each visit, I discussed about different topics with the monks. To my amazed, my girlfriend was shocked but also happy as I was keen to learn more from the monks. So, every year after those days, I would go to Sakorn-nakhorn, sometimes twice a year.

I would go to the temple called Wat Pah Suddhavas and speak with the monks. However not many monks could speak English. So my girlfriend would translate for me, as time went by I got to know the monks more and more. Some occasions, I would go alone to the temple. I remember listening to the monk's chant, also sharing food with them. What I liked about the temple was the pure silence. This made me feel good inside. I explained my feelings to the monks. They smiled and said 'keep enjoying'.

Once I moved to Aberdeen in January 2012 with my wife, Sirijite Blyth, we settled down happily. My wife got a job in a Thai restaurant, in Aberdeen. Later, she told me that there is a monk called Phra Sujana, who had a temple in Hamilton place. He was offering meditation sessions on Tuesday nights. So, on one of the Tuesday nights, me and the wife went to the temple. The temple was newly opened to accommodate Thai Buddhists. On that night, to my amazement, there were only two Scottish men, myself and man called Paul, whom I got to know better as time went by. There were few other nationals. The temple, however, I found different from what I was familiar with back in Sakorn-nakhorn; firstly, the noise, instead of being quiet, it was noisy. Ironically, it was coming from the Thai women, whom should have known better as they born Buddhist. However, that did not stop me from attending in the future. Eventually, my wife stopped coming as she changed her jobs. On those nights, Phra Sujana, then, would teach us meditation, talking us through the basics, which was a great help.

As time went by my wife had to go back to Thailand, as her mother became very ill. She told me the monks in the Sakorn-Nakhorn Temple were asking for me, which was a nice feeling. My life changed accordingly.

Later, I realised that Phra Sujana has moved to new centre at Constitution street and resume my practice. I was going through difficult time; becoming homeless and jobless. After meeting with Phra Sujana again during difficult time, once again I began to practice meditation and attended the centre very often. Over the course of time, along with Phra Sujana's guidance, I began to understand my problems and managed to deal mindfully. There was great strength to accept the situation and ability to deal effectively. Meanwhile, I began to understand myself more and more.

Over the time on my meditation, I was getting, what I call, pictures along with other experiences in my mind and body. It took me sometimes to talk about those experiences to anybody. Then one day, I talk with Phra Sujana and explained it to him. He knew exactly where I was with. So, began my journey with him guiding along the way.

As I practiced more and more, I had so many different experiences and often discussed with Phra Sujana as I was experiencing. Then once he said to me;

'I wish, there are more people like you, as you give a honest answer, what you see and feel, which helps me to know what level you are at. However, I ask other people, they often just say 'fine', 'good' and 'relax'. So I can't help them.'

Later year, Phra Sujana introduced me to do forward walking meditation, which was very new to me. At the beginning, I would walk too fast but gradually, then, I learned to slow down. During my early days, I began to wobble, lose balance. However, I kept practicing at home and eventually my mind and body became one. I began to understand it and practice it mindfully. Then, I had an experience of like I was walking on air, which frightened me. I explained that experience to Phra Sujana, which he was pleased about.

He introduced backward walking meditation, which was a revelation, as what about to happen to me. When I tried this back at home, I had a total different feeling. I expected to be the same as forward walking. When I was walking backwards, instead of combining my mind and body. I felt that I was looking at the wall and distancing myself from it. It reminded my past memories. I explained that to Phra Sujana and told me that I had problem from the past, which he was correct. He then guide me to practice of being mindful of body movements while practicing backward meditation. Once I realised that, I kept practicing. These memories are still there but not as intense as before, the past is slowly going away. I am began to accept those and learning to letting it go slowly.

The more I understood Buddhism and Meditation practices, I asked my wife if it would be possible to become a monk for few days. She was delighted with the idea. I approached Phra Sujana to discuss about it. He was pleased and helped me prepare to be a novice monk. He guided me through Pali, an ancient Buddhist language, chanting and introduced how the ceremony goes. He showed me required etiquettes and doing it properly. I practised every day along with recorded voice of Phra Sujana. To my great surprise, Phra Sujana organised a pre-ordination ceremony and blessing at the centre before I left.

I arrived in Thailand on Thursday 19 June 2014. I was very nervous but passed test at the temple. Thanks to Phra Sujana for his support and help. I was ordained as a novice monk on Monday the 23 June 2014 at 9.00 am. I was given Buddhist name '*Aggadharmo*' (ak-kha-tam-mo). My preceptor was Venerable Phra Vichitto. After the ordination, I returned to my room at 10.45 with great relieved and happy. It was a wonderful moments. I did not have anything but full of happiness and contentment.

This was turning point in my life. When I got back from Thailand to Aberdeen, I was still homeless and jobless. However, I did not feel alone. I felt deep content, even though I did not have material things. When I spoke to Phra Sujana, I could see things in a different way. I began to be more aware and mindful about myself and everything around me. I began to letting anger go slowly and cultivate forgiveness grow slowly at the same rate. Meanwhile, I got a home and job. My life become more happy and able to see things clearly.

One of the great benefits from becoming a monk is lose of weight. To my great surprise, when I flew out to Thailand I was 94 kg one year later I am 81 kg, not by dieting but through meditation,

understanding cravings, being mindful of what I eat. I ate to live but not live to eat. Meantime, I also discover that the Buddhist teachings on the 4 noble truth, which is very applicable in our life.

The four noble truth is; 1. The diagnosis, 2. The Cause, 3. The recovery and 4. The treatment.

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY

KEEP SMILING

COLIN BLYTH (AK KHA TAM MO)