



Forest Meditations

The Verses of the Arahant Tālapuṭa Thera

Translated from the Pali with some reflections

by

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Introduction

On Forest Meditation

On the whole, people have changed little in 2500 years. In those days when the Buddha was alive, there were people living the householder's life with family responsibilities, work to be done and money to be earned to continue life; there were also those who were able to give up their homes and families, to leave all that is valued in the world for the sake of the cultivation of the heart in wisdom and compassion. They were supported by generous householders and in turn they gave their benefactors guidance in the difficulties and troubles of life, guidance which was based on the peace and insight which they had developed.

These two classes of people still exist among Buddhists, the lay people with their many works and burdens, and the bhikkhus (Buddhist monks) and nuns whose only work is the Dhamma, its study and practise. And they still support each other for their mutual benefit.

This book is about the life and experiences of a bhikkhu who reached arahatship (Enlightenment) in the Buddha's days. It is also about how such a life is still possible now for those who wish to make the effort.

But then someone might say, "What's the use of reading about monks and their lives?" A Buddhist might reply, "In the Buddha's days, as now in Buddhist countries, it was the custom for ordinary people to go and see bhikkhus, those who were cultivating their minds and hearts, to get some refreshment for their minds. Just as when the body is thirsty one drinks, so when one's heart is thirsty it should have the chance to drink the Dhamma's nectar." So let us, as it were, go to visit that monk called Tālapuṭa and hear what he has to say.

Before we go to 'see' him, though, we should know something about him as a person and why he decided to leave his home and become 'homeless', as a Buddhist monk.

Who was Tālapuṭa?

He lived at the time of the Buddha and had been trained from his youth as an actor. Steadily his fame grew until he became the manager of a travelling theatrical troupe of "five hundred women," a general figure which means a large company. This troupe of actors, dancers and singers became very famous, people coming from far and wide to attend performances.

We do not know how Tālapuṭa first heard of the Buddha but his acquaintance with the Dhamma was, no doubt, a gradual one. As he came to know more and more of the Dhamma, his aspirations to be ordained as a bhikkhu became stronger. In his lay life he must have been a gifted poet and this ability he used to compose the verses of aspiration with which his stanzas begin.

Let us see first, why he wanted to become a bhikkhu.

Why Go Forth to Homelessness?

People become monks and nuns for various reasons, some good, some bad.

Once the King of Kurus mentioned that people left their homes, shaved their heads and put on the yellow robe because of: old age, sickness, loss of relatives and loss of wealth. These are not the best reasons! But there are worse: laziness and desire for an easy life, to get one's belly filled for instance. There were such bhikkhus in the Buddha's days and now they can certainly be found in every Buddhist country.

Tālapuṭa tells why he became a bhikkhu, first naming some of the bad reasons for doing so:

33. Not from lack of luck did I go forth,
shamelessness, nor caused by mind's inconstancy,
nor banishment nor caused by livelihood,
and therefore I agreed with you, O mind.

He did not become a monk because he was a failure in ordinary life: actually he was a great success. He was not driven into monkhood by some king's act of banishment, nor because he had done some wrong and had to flee to escape the consequences. It was not that he had a weak mind and so just did not know what to do. Not like this! He agreed with the wisdom in his own mind and gave up worldly life.

He saw how difficult it is to practise all the Dhamma while leading a household life. The difficulties and problems which the Dhamma solves—the difficulties and troubles all called *dukkha*—have their source in the mind. If he was to disentangle the tangle of mind, time was necessary—for mindful awareness of all actions, for meditation to calm the mind, for developing the penetrating wisdom-mind. The conditions necessary for this work were found in the way the Buddhist Order was organised. So he decided to become a bhikkhu.

The Occasion of his Ordination

One time, when the Buddha was staying in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagaha, Tālapuṭa visited the Buddha and after paying his respects to him, asked this question:

"I have heard, Lord, this ancient traditional saying of the actor's teachers who, when speaking of players, said 'A player who on the stage or in the arena makes people laugh and delights them by counterfeiting the truth, at the dissolution of the body, after death, is reborn in the company of the Laughing Gods.' What does the Exalted One say about this?"

The Buddha did not answer when this question was asked even thrice. The fourth time he agreed to answer it: "In the case of those beings who were not free of lust, aversion and delusion before, but were bound with the bonds of lust, aversion and delusion; in such cases a player who on the stage or in the arena brings about lustful, averse or deluded states of mind so that such beings become still more lustful, averse and deluded; while he himself is heedless and slothful, making others heedless and slothful—such a person on the dissolution of the body, after death, is reborn in the Hell of Laughter. And if his view is as you say: 'that whatever player on the stage... by counterfeiting the truth... is reborn in the company of the Laughing Gods,' then I declare that he is of wrong view. I declare that there will be reappearance in one of two destinations: in hell or birth as an animal."

When he heard these words Tālapuṭa wept, not, as he explained to the Buddha, because of the answer that he had received but because he had been led astray and deceived by his teachers. Then he praised the Buddha and asked for the Going Forth and the Admission to the

Sangha as a bhikkhu. After living resolute and secluded, he “in no long time”—a phrase which often means several years, attained the Path and Fruit of the arahat.

This is the bare account of how he became a bhikkhu and later achieved arahatship. It should be filled out with his aspirations which he made from time to time while he was still a layman. These are the first sixteen verses among his fifty-five and show the mind of a dedicated layman aspiring to win insight-wisdom (*vipassanā-paññā*). At this point all his verses will be given followed by some sketches and comments.

The Verses of the Arahant Tālapuṭa Thera

I. Thoughts before Going Forth

1. When, O when shall I live all alone
in mountain caves, unmated with desire,
clear seeing as unstable all that comes to be?
This wish of mine, when indeed will it be?
2. When shall I, wearing the patchwork robes
of colour dun, be sage, uncraving, never making mine,
with greed, aversion and delusion slain
and to the wild woods gone, in bliss abide?
3. When shall I, this body seeing clear —
unstable nest of dying and disease
oppressed by age and death, dwell free from fear
in the woods alone? When indeed will it be?
4. When indeed shall I dwell seizing the sharpened sword
of wisdom made? When cut the craving creeper —
breeder of fear, bringer of pain and woe,
and twining everywhere? When indeed will it be?
5. When lion-like in the victor's stance
shall I draw quick the sage's sword
of wisdom forged and fiery might
quick breaking Māra with his host? When indeed will it be?
6. When myself exerting, shall I be seen
in goodly company of those esteeming Dhamma?
Those with faculties subdued who see things as they are?
Those who are 'Thus'? When indeed will it be?
7. When indeed will weariness not worry me —
hunger, thirst and wind, heat, bugs and creeping things,
while bent on my own good, the Goal,
in Giribaja's wilds? When indeed will it be?
8. When indeed shall I, self-mindful and composed
win to that wisdom known by Him,
the Greatest Sage, the Four Truths won within,
so very hard to see? When indeed will it be?
9. When shall I, possessed of meditation's calm
with wisdom see the forms innumerable,
sounds, smells and tastes, touches and dhammas too,
as a raging blaze? When will this be for me?
10. When shall I indeed, when with abusive words
addressed, not be displeased because of that,
and then again when praised be neither pleased
because of that? When will this be for me?

11. When shall I indeed weigh as the same:
wood, grass and creepers with these craved-for groups,
both inner and external forms
the dhammas numberless? When will it be for me?
12. When in the season of the black rain-cloud
shall I follow the path within the wood
trodden by those who See; robes moistened
by new falling rain? When indeed will it be?
13. When in a mountain cave having heard the peacock's cry,
that crested twice-born bird down in the wood,
shall I arise and collect together mind
for attaining the undying? When indeed will it be?
14. When shall I, the Ganges and the Yamunā,
the Sarasvati and the awful ocean mouth
of the Balava-abyss, by psychic might
untouching go across? When indeed will it be?
15. When shall I, like charging elephant unbound,
break up desire for sensual happiness
and shunning all the marks of loveliness
strive in concentrated states? When indeed will it be?
16. When, as pauper by his debts distressed,
by creditors oppressed, a treasure finds,
shall I be pleased the Teaching to attain
of the Greatest Sage? When indeed will it be?

II. Self-admonishments after Going Forth

17. Long years have I been begged by you
'Enough for you of this living in a house.'
but now I have gone forth to homelessness
what reason is there, mind, for you not to urge me on?
18. Was I not, O mind, assured by you indeed:
'The brightly plumaged birds on Giribaja's peaks
greeting the thunder, the sound of great Indra,
will bring to you joy meditating in the wood?'
19. Dear ones and friends and kin within the family,
playing and loving, sensual pleasures of the world:
all have I given up and reached at last to this,
even now, O mind, you are not pleased with me.
20. Mine you are, mind, possessed by none but me;
why then lament when comes this time to arm?
Seeing all as unstable this is now renounced:
longing for, desirous of the Undying State.
21. Said He who speaks the best, Best among mankind,
man-taming trainer, Physician Great indeed:

- 'Unsteady, likened to a monkey is the mind,
extremely hard to check by one not rid of lust.'
22. For varied, sweet, delightful are desires of sense;
blind, foolish common men long have lain in them
seeking after birth again,' 'tis they who wish for ill,
by mind they are led on to perish in hell.
23. 'In the jungle you should dwell, resounding with the cries
of peacocks and herons, by leopard and tiger hailed:
Abandon longing for the body—do not fail'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
24. 'Grow in concentrations, the faculties and powers,
develop wisdom-factors by meditation deep
and then with Triple Knowledge touch the Buddha-sāsana.'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
25. 'Grow in the Eightfold Way for gaining the Undying
leading to Release and cleansing of all stains;
Plunge to the utter destruction of all ill!'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
26. 'Thoroughly examine the craved-for groups as ill.
Abandon that from which arises ill.
Here and now make you an end of ill.'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
27. 'Thoroughly see inward the impermanent as ill,
the void as without self, and misery as bane,
and so the mind restrain in its mental wanderings.'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
28. 'Head-shaven and unsightly, go to be reviled,
among the people beg with skull-like bowl in hand.
To the Greatest Sage, the Teacher's word devote yourself.'
So indeed my mind you used to urge at me on.
29. 'Wander well-restrained among the streets and families
having a mind to sensual pleasures unattached,
as the full moon shining clear at night.'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
30. 'You should be a forest-dweller, almsman too,
a graveyard-dweller and a rag-robe wearer too,
one never lying down, delighting in austerities.'
So indeed my mind you used to urge me on.
31. As he who having planted trees about to fruit
should wish to cut a tree down to the root:
that simile you made, mind, that do you desire
when on me you urge the unstable and the frail.
32. Formless one, far-traveller, a wanderer alone,
no more shall I your bidding do, for sense desires

are ill, leading to bitter fruit, to brooding fear:
with mind Nibbāna-turned I shall walk on.

33. Not from lack of luck did I go forth,
nor shamelessness, nor caused by mind's inconstancy,
nor banishment nor caused by livelihood,
and therefore I agreed with you, O mind.
34. 'Having few wishes, disparagement's abandoning,
with the stilling of all ill is praised by goodly men'
so indeed, my mind, then you urged at me,
but now you go back to habits made of old.
35. Craving, unknowing, the liked and the disliked,
delighting in forms and pleasing feelings too,
dear pleasures of the senses—all have been vomited:
never to that vomit can I make myself return.
36. In every life, O mind, your word was done by me,
in many births I have not sought to anger you.
That which within oneself produced by you, ingrate,
long wandered on in ill create by you.
37. Indeed it is you, mind, make us brāhmaṇas,
you make us noble warriors, kings and seers as well,
sometimes it is merchants or workers we become,
or led by you indeed we come to gods' estate.
38. Indeed you are the cause of becoming titans too,
and you are the root for becoming in the hells;
sometimes there is going to birth as animals,
or led by you indeed we come to ghosts' estate.
39. Not now will you injure me ever and again,
moment by moment as though showing me a play,
as with one gone mad you play with me —
but how, O mind, have you been failed by me?
40. Formerly this wandering mind, a wanderer,
went where it wished, wherever whim or pleasure led,
today I shall thoroughly restrain it
as a trainer's hook the elephant in rut.
41. He, the Master made me see this world —
unstable, unsteady, lacking any essence;
now in the Conqueror's Teaching, mind make me leap,
cross me over the great floods so very hard to cross!
42. Now it's not for you, mind, as it was before,
not likely am I to return to your control —
in the Greatest Sage's Sāsana I have gone forth
and those like me are not by ruin wrapped.
43. Mountains, seas, rivers, and this wealthy world,
four quarters, points between, the nadir and the heavens

- all the Three becomings unstable and oppressed.
Where, mind, having gone will you happily delight?
44. Firm, firm in my aim! What will you do, my mind?
No longer in your power, mind, nor your follower.
None would even handle a double-ended sack,
let be a thing filled full and flowing with nine streams.
45. Whether peak or slopes or fair open space
or forest besprinkled with fresh showers in the Rains,
where frequently are found boar and antelope,
there will you delight to a grotto-lodging gone.
46. Fair blue-throated and fair-crested, the peacock fair of tail,
wing-plumes of many hues, the passengers of air,
greeting the thunder with fair-sounding cries
will bring to you joy meditating in the wood.
47. When the sky-god rains on the four inch grass
and on full-flowering cloud-like woods,
within the mountains like a log I'll lie
and soft that seat to me as cotton down.
48. Thus will I do even as a master should:
Let whatever is obtained be enough for me,
that indeed I'll do to you as energetic man
by taming makes supple a cat-skin bag.
49. Thus will I do even as a master should;
Let whatever is obtained be enough for me,
by energy I'll bring you in my power
as a skilled trainer the elephant in rut.
50. With you well-tamed, no longer turning round,
like to a trainer with a straight running horse,
I am able to practise the safe and blissful Path
ever frequented by them who guard the mind.
51. I'll bind you by strength to the meditation-base
as elephant to post by a strong rope bound;
well-guarded by me, well-grown with mindfulness,
you shall, by all becomings, be without support.
52. With wisdom cutting off wending the wrong path,
by endeavour restrained, established in the Path,
having seen the origin of passing, rising too —
you will be an heir to the Speaker of the Best.
53. You dragged me, mind, as on an ox's round,
in the power of the Four Perversions set;
come now, serve the Great Sage, Compassionate,
He the sure cutter of fetters and bonds.
54. As a deer roams in the very varied woods
and goes to the pleasant crest garlanded by clouds,

so there you will delight on that unentangled mount.
There is no doubt, mind, you'll be established there.

55. Men and women enjoying any happiness
controlled by thy desires and delighting in life,
blind fools they are who comply with Māra's power,
they driven on, O mind, servants are of thee.

Theragāthā Verses
10911–145

Tālapuṭa's Aspirations

1. *Mountain Caves*

Best of all for meditation, caves are cool in hot weather, warm in cold weather, and silent. Those in the mountains, high among rocks, are less accessible, places where it is easier to be alone, apart from bats and other local inhabitants. Mountain caves are not for the sociable. You live in them alone. They are quiet and remote, the sort of place that most people would dislike to live in just because of the silence.

Because of craving people in general want to be mated. They need mate, friend, companion, relatives—and other people generally. Without them, they are uneasy. In Pali language one's 'second' is an idiom for one's wife, but 'being with a second' is also craving. Being without a second is not to have craving. Mountain caves are the sort of place where progress towards being "unmated with desire" can be made.

When you live alone in a solitary place, with few wishes, insight into impermanence becomes easier. How to see impermanence when the mind is distracted by a thousand and one people, possessions, and works? Only when all this entanglement has been given up is there a chance to penetrate to the truth of impermanence.

2. *Wild Woods*

These are good for meditation too. They have to be far from peoples' noisy houses and machines. A place to reach only on foot, and where animals, more or less wild, also live happily.

A bhikkhu intent on meditation likes such places which are not the favourite dwelling of ordinary people (who only go there for picnics on fine days). The meditative bhikkhu is happy to spend nights and all seasons there wearing his robes made up out of pieces of cloth sewn together—worthless to a thief, and coloured an earthy yellow-brown—unattractive to the layman.

Surrounded by cool green trees what will he "make mine"? The surroundings encourage a cool heart with no craving and a minimum of possessions—just his bowl and robes and a few other things. And it is likely that, given this setting, he will be able to "slay" greed, aversion and delusion, the three Roots of Evil. These three cause all the trouble, (apart from naturally caused disasters: earthquakes, droughts, typhoons and so on—and some diseases) in this world. So when they have been known and seen, through and through, they disappear forever. Why should he not "abide in bliss" then?

3. *In the Woods Alone*

Tālapuṭa wishes to live in such places "free from fear." Most people, even though they live in the middle of cities where the numbers of people and the seeming regularity of buildings and services bolster their confidence against death, are far from being free of fear. To live in the woods alone where there are no amusements or distractions, nothing to take the mind away from the basic fear—of seeing things as they really are, empty of self—would be intolerable except to the ardent seeker of Dhamma.

Where does he find it? In his own body "unstable nest of dying and disease." The brood raised in this nest is fear and oppression by ageing and death. But "this body, seeing

clear” (with *vipassanā*) breaks up such fear. One fears what one does not understand. This means ‘understand’ on the deepest levels of insight (*vipassanā*).

So either fear, or understanding of Dhamma, are born of this body, according to the way one looks at it. In places with many people we may feel ‘safe’ enough but behind that facade of security lurks fear. It is a good test to go to wild and remote places and see how one can live there. With confidence and happiness? Or with longing to get back to familiar people, places and habits? One should echo Tālapuṭa and say “When will it be?”

4. *The Craving-Creeper*

Creepers in tropical forests are sometimes of immense size. A huge trunk all twisted leans out from the ground towards some overhead support from which its branches twisting here and there drape whole trees with a greenery other than their own. The creeper’s branches loop from one tree to the next... out... further...

Craving is like this too. It has the huge and ancient trunk of ignorance (*avijjā*) all twisted round and round with wrong distorted views of reality. The craving-creeper is supported by the forest of sense-impressions. It blankets and strangles true understanding of this world, of this mind and body. And its branches spread out further and further. Even a poor man who cannot ‘satisfy’ his desires can grow a vast craving-creeper in his heart. Often those in the position to ‘satisfy’ the unsatisfiable, succeed only in making their craving-creepers grow to monstrous proportions.

Well, this creeper’s fruits are not wanted by people generally. Who wants fear or bodily pain or mental distress? Yet everyone grows the craving-creeper! The answer to those poisonous fruits is not the doctor or the psychiatrist, both of whom can only patch things up, but “the sharpened sword of wisdom made.”

With this sword the craving-creeper can be cut down—during insight meditation. Nothing else will cut it down though.

Feeding one’s wants won’t cut it down,
Hating one’s self won’t cut it down,
Averting one’s gaze won’t cut it down,
The wisdom-sword *will* cut it down.

5. *Like a Lion*

Lions are unafraid of other animals. So the Buddha is compared to a lion, quite fearless, and his bold truthfulness to the lion’s roar—which still causes consternation among those who grasp at beliefs and views.

The meditator seated upright and alert in some lonely place is like the lion too. Only such a person can draw that wisdom sword quick enough to cut off the defilements. The Buddha is shown routing, with tranquil meditation and penetrative vision, the hosts of Māra at the time of his Enlightenment. The Māras that he routs though pictured as hideous demons are really the more familiar Death, Defilements of the mind, and the processes of making Kamma. It is said that a deva (god) called Māra also objects to beings going beyond his realm and tries to hinder this. Most people will consider the first three hindrance enough.

6. Goodly Company of those Esteeming Dhamma

Some get ordination as bhikkhus and with little or no training go off by themselves and live in the wilds. This is foolishness and often points out a person who cannot bear correction, or the sort of person who says quickly “I know” when one tries to show him better ways of doing things. There is no hope that this person can grow in Dhamma. Probably he has and will increase (besides his conceit) only one thing: wrong views.

To have the company of other people sincerely practising the Dhamma is a great support and help, not only those who have reached one’s own level of development but those who far surpass it. It is very necessary to live with such Teachers who are worthy of one’s respect and devoted service. They alone can give sure advice about difficulties in meditation. When one has no access to them, then the Suttas, the *Visuddhimagga*, and the Commentaries must be one’s source of advice. But they are called ‘dead’ Dhamma, while the words of one’s Teacher are ‘living’ Dhamma.

The further people have gone along the Path of Dhamma the more respectful they are, to the Triple Gem, to their Teachers, to their companions and friends, and to the Dhamma as practised. One way of judging where one has got to on the Path, is to examine whether one esteems Dhamma or not. (Or does one have a carping, sceptical, uncertain mind?) That sort of mind will never see things as they really are.

For that, it is necessary to subdue: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body (touch), and mind—the six faculties. This is a warning to those who think that they can have their worldly pleasures *and* the fruits of Dhamma too. This is just self-deception, another name for delusion. Lead and enjoy a worldly life, or devote mind, speech and body to the Dhamma—a finer enjoyment. In between there are various shades of Dhamma-practise hindered by more or less worldly attachment. One should be honest with oneself about where one’s at.

“Those who are Thus”—who see things as they really are—they are the arahats, the best Teachers, most worthy of respect. But, some people will object, that was all right in the Buddha’s days when there were arahats. Now there are none. This is not true. Wherever Dhamma is practised intensively it may be expected that the final attainment will be reached. Both Thailand and Burma have great Teachers whose final attainment can be inferred from their Dhamma. In N.E. Thailand for instance, Venerable Ācariya¹ Mun (Bhuridatta Mahāthera) and some of his disciples are believed to have won arahatship in modern times.

7. Giribbaja’s Wilds

When you stand on the top of Mount Vulture Peak (Gijjhakuta) and look down four or five hundred feet to the plain below enclosed by a ring of hills, you see only scrubby jungle and rocks, the site of the ancient city of Giribbaja. Perhaps it looked much the same in Tālapuṭa’s days with some ruins still remaining from the old city.

Like other places we have described it was quiet and secluded. Few human beings went there though there are in any jungle plenty of non-human beings, especially the insects and snakes mentioned by Tālapuṭa. Living in such a place means having patience with and loving kindness for all these other beings. Impatient and hot-tempered people cannot live comfortably under rocks or at the foot of trees because they soon come into conflict with other creatures. The cool-hearted person is content with a simple resting place and does not worry about other beings. In fact, when loving kindness is strong in anyone, he has no fear of tigers and snakes and they do not fear him and so cause him no trouble.

¹ Venerable Teacher (*Tan Acharn* in Thai) a respectful form of address for one’s Teacher.

Other discomforts face the jungle-dweller: weariness, hunger, thirst and wind—and heavy rain too if the shelter is not waterproof. All these are a test of his equanimity so that when food, drink and weather are not to his liking he does not get depressed, short-tempered or retreat to more comfortable surroundings.

All these things should be expected by a person bent on his own good. Few will find the Goal of Nibbāna easy to reach; for most the path is sure to be rough and winding (the results of past unwholesome kamma), so loving kindness, patience and equanimity are needed.

8. *The Four Truths won Within*

The Four Noble Truths are easy to learn:

Dukkha (= Suffering of all kinds, physical, mental)

Causal arising of Dukkha (= Craving)

Cessation of Dukkha (= Nibbāna)

Path leading to Cessation of Dukkha (= 8-fold Path)

but very hard to see in oneself as the Truth. Why is this? Generally we want to turn away from dukkha, not face it. We turn away to distractions, amusements, anything to avoid looking at the unsatisfactory state of this mind and body and the world it experiences. Why do we not want to look at dukkha? Painful, uncomfortable! Craving turns us away to look at something else and that very craving is the source of dukkha. What is craving then? Craving for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts—the six kinds of craving for experience of this world. But we crave not only the pleasures of the senses (including mind) but also to exist. I want to go on... on... on... I want to be here and now. I want to exist in some future life. This is craving for existence, for being. But sometimes being becomes too painful because of disease, misfortune or the acts of other people. Then one wishes for non-existence, the craving to end it all, for death and nothingness. Due to the wrong view produced from this craving people commit suicide in many ways, longing not to exist. Their longing, a perverted craving for existence, guarantees that they will exist, though they will have to experience pain and suffering caused by the depressed and self-hating mind which they had when dying. All this craving—for sense-pleasures, existence and non-existence, causes dukkha. This is what is meant by saying: Craving is the condition for the arising of dukkha. When there is no more craving, since the roots of evil—greed, aversion and delusion—have been eradicated by the cultivation of moral conduct, meditation and wisdom, then there is the experience called Nibbāna. While craving is present, Nibbāna cannot be known, but when there is the seeing of this third Noble Truth, it is realised in one's heart which at that time is calm, peaceful and blissful, a peace to which there is no end for there is no source of disturbance in oneself which could end it. This is different from the peace gained through meditation which can be upset later by the arising of defilements. Meditation is the most important aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path, though it cannot succeed unless the practicer's moral conduct is pure. It is based on this and leads to the highest development of wisdom, the seeing of the four Noble Truths in oneself, combined, with the emotionally purified states of renunciation, loving kindness and compassion. The Noble Eightfold Path, which is the fourth Noble Truth, is composed of factors which form the groups of moral conduct, meditation and wisdom. (See Verse 25.)

These Truths are “very hard to see.” Now we may understand why this is so. Intellectually one may know them and occasionally remember them, but “see” here means ‘having penetrated with insight’ so that one lives with them all the time, so that one's life becomes the Noble Path itself.

9. A Raging Blaze

This world is on fire. With what does it blaze? Greed, aversion and delusion are the fires that burn all beings here. These fires are kindled because of what? Pleasant feeling, painful feeling and neutral feeling. How do they arise? Feeling arises dependent on contact, that is, contacts through forms (sight-objects), sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental factors (dhamma). These six types of contact arise when three factors are present: the appropriate sense organ, its objects, and consciousness by way of that sense. We do not see all this as a raging blaze, blinded as we are by ignorance (of the Four Noble Truths) and led on by craving. So, we have to experience a lot of dukkha because we do not have either "meditation's calm" or "wisdom." We have to get burnt again and again until we are tired of burning, tired of dukkha. Then we are ready to do something about ourselves.

10. Abuse and Praise

The first is taken as painful. It insults 'me', my big ego. The second is welcome because it inflates this ego and makes me feel good. So we fall down between this pair of opposites into rejection and acceptance out of which grow aversion and greed. Worldly ordinary people eagerly grasp gain and honour, praise and happiness, rejecting loss, dishonour, blame, and suffering. These are the eight worldly dhammas, inseparable from existence. The Noble Ones have equanimity towards them all.

11. Wood, Grass and Creepers

When you live in the country these things are all around you, most of them of no particular value. Certainly you do not think "These pieces of wood, blades of grass and strands of creeper are me; they are myself." What one values as oneself is this body, the various kinds of feelings, the process of perception, the thoughts and other mental events and the six sense consciousnesses (including the mind). There is a great difference in one's attitude to that tree dying and this body dying. This shows our ignorance in that we identify a self (or soul), an owner, where there is none.

12. The Season of the Black Raincloud

The Rains in India and South-east Asia last for months. A time of mud, soaking forests and (probably) leeches. Not the time for a pleasant day's picnic in the woods! People stay in their villages and towns, they cultivate rice but do not go much into the forest. So the Rains are when forests are most silent with few visitors. It is then that forest bhikkhus such as those who live with their Teachers in North-east Thailand, make great efforts to practise the Dhamma. Their Teachers, as in the Buddha-time, are those who See.

13. Attaining the Undying

The Undying, the Deathless: this is Nibbāna. These words do not mean an eternal state but point out that which is not born and so does not die. In most people's minds birth and death are continuous as states of mind arise and pass away. The arahat when he experiences Nibbāna goes beyond this birth and death. For the attainment of the Undying those mountain caves which we have talked about are ideal. And the peacock's cry close by might seem to say "Come on! Don't be lazy!"

14. The Awful Ocean-Mouth

People then believed in an immense and nearly bottomless pit in the ocean; perhaps a myth originating in sailors' tales about a whirlpool. (About this, the Buddha commented that

their belief was foolish but that painful feeling could be called such an abyss.) Tālapuṭa thinks that when he has developed in Dhamma he will be able to cross these stretches of water without even wetting his feet. If when he composed this verse he thought success in such powers necessarily marked an arahat, then he was wrong. But he may have known that while some arahats have such powers fully developed, others possessed less of them or none at all. Here he aspires to become an arahat who does possess them. They are not 'miraculous' but just a natural development of jhāna (deep meditation) and so can be obtained by both ordinary men and Noble Ones, both Buddhists and believers in God or Gods.

15. *Charging Elephant Unbound*

What is more powerful than this? No machines existed in those days, so the elephant illustrated power and strength. This is what is needed to 'shun the marks of loveliness'—not to be captivated by them, not even to get attached to them. Only when they are shunned (in a cave or forest maybe) by restraint of the senses, is it possible to "break up desire for sensual happiness." Just the thing that we are all trapped in! But unless it is laid aside there is no chance of 'striving in concentrated states', that is, the jhānas. And without them, the mind is weak, too weak to produce insight. The might, strength and power needed to "break up desire for sensual happiness" comes from the jhānas. You might say "Those arahats must have been gloomy old sticks seeing only ugliness!" But that is getting it all wrong. Not seeing beauty helps to calm the mind, it is a phase of the training. Mountains, valleys, forest—all are beautiful to an arahat but he does not try to seize on them as 'me' and 'mine'. He sees beauty when he wants to and with no attachment.

16. *The Pauper*

A person is really poor through not making wholesome kamma, never doing good. Material poverty may last only for one life but the results of mental-emotional poverty can affect many lives. One is 'poor' when the debts of many evil kammās pile up while the 'creditors' which oppress such a person are the different sorts of resultant dukkha that he or she may perhaps begin to suffer even in the very life when those actions have been done. The 'treasure' that a person finds can be explained in various ways: the Three Jewels (or Treasures)—the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha in which it is proper to feel confident; or the seven Noble Treasures: faith, moral conduct, shame, fear of evil, learning, generosity and wisdom; or the treasure of Noble attainment as Stream-winner and so on, which is meant here. The wealth of this world decays: but 'attainment of the Teaching of the Greatest Sage' is undecaying riches.

* * *

This concludes the stanzas which Tālapuṭa composed while still aspiring for the [Going Forth](#) . After these aspirations there are three other verses on Going Forth, followed by others upon [The Practises of a Bhikkhu](#) . This section leads on to the main part of the verses which concern [The Mind](#) in various ways. A few verses on [Delight in the Forest](#) are followed by one which indicates some success in the training. These verses, as they are dealt with in the following pages, are not in the order of the text, but the number of the verse commented on has been indicated.

Going Forth

17. This is one among many verses in which Tālapuṭa holds a conversation with his mind. You could say “But I thought that Buddhists taught that there was no self or soul among the changing patterns of mind and body? But here is Tālapuṭa with two selves, what he calls himself, and his mind! How do you account for this?” The answer is that his ‘conversation’ is much like what goes on in our own heads when desires are countered by objections to them. Though there are just streams of mind and body processes yet there appear to be two people inside this skull, one saying ‘yes’ and the other ‘no’. In this particular verse the perversity of the untamed mind is well-illustrated. While a layman he aspired to be a bhikkhu but once he had left the household life and gone forth to homelessness, his mind slackened and was no longer enthusiastic. A case of “it’s greener on the other side of the fence”—just craving (*taṇhā*). So he thinks “Come on! Stir yourself, mind! Don’t idle!”

19. The same theme. Here is his mind not pleased with bhikkhu-life, though that same mind-stream has brought it about. Mind is full of craving. While it has “dear ones, friends, relatives, playing and loving, sensual pleasures of the world” the mind’s craving has something to get involved with, get entangled with. The craving mind is not satisfied with this of course, but its appetite is dulled. It is when Tālapuṭa has given up all this that the mind starts to get agitated. No distractions! No escapes from dukkha! (People living a worldly life sometimes think that monks and nuns are escapists, but the latter, if they really get down to practise, have no way of escaping dukkha and must face it, while the former have many escape-routes through amusements and sensual variety.) When worldly escape-routes are closed off, then the craving mind is not pleased.

42. Again Tālapuṭa exhorts his mind—“It’s not like it used to be, craving mind! You used to be in control but now I am a bhikkhu. The ruination brought on by craving is not for me!” What ruination? The ruins of disease, decay and death, again and again. People are ruined by the defilements in their own hearts, they ruin their own futures and ruin other beings about them. The world is ruined by greed, aversion and delusion, the Roots of Evil. A good bhikkhu is not wrapped up by ruination (lit., not a bearer of destruction), instead, having gone-forth in the Buddha’s Sasana (Teaching, Dispensation), he makes efforts to get beyond craving.

* * *

The Practises of a Bhikkhu

28. How does he do this? By leading the kind of life where craving finds little to grab hold of. Take the bhikkhu’s alms-round as an example. For most people food is very much an object of craving, so they try to get what they like and have as much as they like. A bhikkhu goes out with his black iron bowl and stands silently before people’s houses to receive whatever they are pleased to offer him. (He does not ‘beg’, as he may not, unless sick, ask for anything; nor does he sing or chant but should walk and stand silently.) He accepts food as it comes, the poor with the good, the tasteless with the tasty, the disliked with the liked—which helps to cut down on craving. His head is shaven, too, so the craving and conceit connected with hair does not trouble him. And he wears no ornaments at all, just brownish-yellow robes, so from a worldly point of view he may be “unsightly” but that is just another way of cutting down on craving. In this way he devotes himself to the Buddha’s words.

29. In the last verse, the bhikkhu’s exterior appearance was emphasised while this verse deals with his interior attitude while going on his almsround. He is “well-restrained”. What is that?

As he passes shops he does not gaze in the windows, or at the faces of people who pass by or who give him almsfood; he is not attracted by sounds of music nor does he show disgust at any bad smells that may come his way; his steps are steady, neither showing off pretended calm by slow walking nor exhibiting many desires by rushing along. He just goes steadily “having a mind to sensual pleasures unattached”—content with what he gets. A mind like this he compares to “the full moon shining clear at night”—radiant with loving kindness and free from the clouds of defilements. Finally, in the refrain that runs through many of these verses, he reproaches his mind “You used to tell me to act like this”—meaning that now he does so, the mind plays a different tune.

30. The austere practises which the Buddha allowed bhikkhus to undertake also aim at lessening desires. Tālapuṭa mentions some of them in this verse: *a forest-dweller* (who lives five hundred bowlengths—say half a mile—in the forest); *an almsman* (a bhikkhu who always goes on almsround and does not rely on lay-supporters bringing food); *a graveyard dweller* (he lives at the place where corpses are left exposed or else burnt, so that the impermanence of bodies is obvious); *a rag-robe-wearer* (gathering rags or off-cuts of cloth he patches together his robes, not accepting ready-made ones from lay people); *one never lying down* is a bhikkhu who practises in three postures—walking, standing and sitting—but does not lie down. He sleeps sitting up and in this way manages to restrict his hours of sleep—more time for meditation. These methods and others are practised privately with only the practicer and his Teacher knowing about them. They are never advertised by wise bhikkhus who are not concerned either to get the admiration of others or much support from them. Such austerities as these were an important part of the practise leading to attainment of the arahats of old, as today of Venerable Acariya Mun (Bhuridatta Mahāthera) and his enlightened disciples in N.E. Thailand, who urge the young bhikkhus and novices training under them to use them. Visiting lay people who come to practise meditation are also expected to practise them, such as eating only once a day, another austere practise. (For all these, with explanations, see *The Path of Purification*, Ch. II, and *With Robes and Bowl* Wheel No. 83/84.)

* * *

The Mind

The Mind's Inconstancy

30. Practises like these should never be ends in themselves, but aids for controlling the errant mind. We have already come across Tālapuṭa's dispute with his mind and now he is upbraiding it—“You're not a wild elephant going where you like! You're my mind! Now it's time to get ready, so don't grieve! Be joyful!” What should one get ready for? One should be prepared for the great battle against Māra and therefore put on the armour of the Dhamma. Tālapuṭa longs for Nibbāna while seeing that all of this conditioned world (or any other) is impermanent, unstable, liable to arising and passing away and therefore unsatisfactory, or dukkha.

31. But his mind is still attached to “the unstable and the frail.” At some other time it made a simile to urge him to give it all up: A man with much labour plants fruit trees, cultivates them for some years until they reach the fruit-bearing stage and then, when they are loaded with fruit about to ripen, cuts them down. Rational? No, but no madder than a person who with great effort has renounced family, money, pleasure and so on only to give way to some impulse which destroys the fruits of his renunciation. There is no safety from the whims of the mind until arahatship is reached, though a certain security is won by the stream-winner.

34. Still his mind goes “back to habits made of old”—while he was a layman, in spite of the fact that when he still lived the household life, his mind urged him to practise Dhamma: to have few wishes, to abandon the disparagement of others, to still all dukkha—these things being praised by wise men. This is opposite to the world’s way which is to have many desires and to cultivate them so that they increase. Generally too, disparaging other people is popular in the world—it gives an outlet for our aversion while at the same time boosting our conceit. No wonder it’s popular! And people are not concerned with stilling dukkha. When it gets too much to bear then they turn to other things or even take some treatment to reduce it to manageable proportions. They would be lost without dukkha, because their conception of ‘selfhood’ is dukkha, and where would they be without ‘themselves’.

39. Again grumbling at his mind—the mad mind, the mind mad with defilements. There is no sharp dividing line between ‘sane’ and ‘mad’, so people are either more sane and less mad or more mad and less sane, according to the development of wisdom (*paññā*) or the strength of defilements (*kilesa*.) A madman who plays about senselessly is just the extreme development of ourselves, and all of us, like Tālapuṭa before he attained arahatship, are under the power of craving and defilement. The play that the mad mind shows us is this world, several times distorted through the lenses of permanence, happiness, selfhood and beauty. This is how the mad mind causes us injury again and again through successive births, high and low. His final question to his mind means “What have I *not* done for you?”—and in this Tālapuṭa is the same as everyone else—who follow the urges, wishes and reasons of the mind, whether or not it is defiled, wishing to enjoy the play at all costs.

Desires

21. Here the Buddha is quoted likening the mind to a monkey. Anyone who has watched monkeys will know why. They exhibit unrestrained lust and quarrelsome anger while they can do nothing for more than a few minutes before they get tired of it. They swing from one support to the next, running and jumping and playing. Know anyone with a mind like that? For such a monkey mind a *man-taming trainer* is needed, or else a *great physician* who can tell how it is to be cured. These are both epithets of the Buddha, who is also “He who speaks the best,” and “Best among mankind.” And what does he say? “It is very difficult to check the mind when one is not rid of lust.” Only the person who is prepared to loosen his hold on the pleasures of this world will succeed in taming the monkey-mind. In other words: you can’t have it both ways.

22. It’s extremely hard for us to check because we as “blind foolish common men long have lain” down in sensual desires which are “varied, sweet, delightful.” Someone might object “You can call yourself ‘blind, foolish and a common man’ if you like, but why should you insult me? I’ve got two eyes in my head, came tops in school and university and I’ve a family going back to the Conquest!” In reply a Buddhist might say “You’re blind because you don’t understand about dukkha and its arising. You’re foolish since you don’t restrain yourself and so make bad kamma rooted in greed, aversion and delusion which will bring you pain and suffering—more dukkha. And you’re called a common man or an ordinary man, like myself, as you have not yet experienced the true nobility of stream-winning, once-returning, non-returning or arahatship. But people who make a certain amount of effort with generosity, moral conduct and meditation are at least called ‘beautiful ordinary men’ while I fear that you may fall into the class of ‘foolish ordinary men.’” What any kind of ordinary men get is birth again—that is what they desire but their desire is for what brings *dukkha* (translated ‘ill’), even to the extent that having been led on by sensual desires to make much evil kamma they bring themselves “to perish in hell.” Here someone is sure to say “Oh come, you Buddhists don’t believe in hell, do you?” The answer is easy “We don’t believe in it. We understand it!” “What does that mean?” “Hells (or

heavens) are not articles of faith but they can be understood by what the mind is capable of. Take two people: one is gentle, compassionate and generally unselfish, always thinking how to help others—a happy smiling person; the other is twisted up by hatred, bursting with anger and resentment, ready to kill and torture. Now the first man is called 'a heavenly man' and dying with that slightly superhuman mind will gain a superhuman birth; while the second even now is 'a hellish man' and when he dies with his evil kamma in mind, with that subhuman mind he gains a very subhuman birth. Easy to explain!" But desire for any kind of birth, human, superhuman, or subhuman, is desire for dukkha, because even the heavens, so delightful, are impermanent. And so are the hells.

35. The name for pleasures in this verse may not please some people, "How disgusting to compare sense-pleasure to vomit!" When one knows no better, sense-pleasures are fine (a beautiful girl, a handsome man, sweet music, scent of flowers, fine food, pleasant bodily sensations) but they are *the cords of sense-desire* which tie us down. Having loosened these cords one's mind discovers pleasure far superior to them, heavenly or divine pleasures in the heavens of sensuality and of subtle form. Even these pleasures are nothing to one who has enjoyed the Paramasukha—the Sublime Happiness of Nibbāna free of all attachments. Though one has not got this far yet, if some of the pleasures of meditation have been experienced, then other grosser worldly pleasure will seem to be like vomit. Who will want to eat what has been rejected? So who, having tasted the pleasures of meditation and renunciation will go back to the bondage of the senses?

55. Like the last this is a blunt verse. It tells the worldly person what he does not want to hear while anyone really devoted to Dhamma appreciates such straightforwardness. "Desires," "delighting in life" and "enjoying any happiness" are all *the same as Māra*. What is the power of Māra here? This means the strength of the defilements in one's heart whereby one is driven on to desire, delight and enjoy. And though a person like this speaks of 'my mind' as though he is the owner, truly, as Tālapuṭa points out, he is only a servant of mind, swept along by the mind's desires. So one knows where one's at! In the Dhamma there is no deceitfulness. Openness and straightforwardness on the other hand are features of Dhamma, and of the people who practise it.

Mind and Dukkha

26. Here is Tālapuṭa's mind instructing him what he ought to do, instruction which he thought up before his Going-forth, and then found difficult to carry out afterwards. We have met the Four Noble Truths before (see, 8) and here three of them are presented as an exhortation. "The craved-for groups" are the five constituents identified as a person: body, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Since they are impermanent and craved for or grasped at as me and mine, they are the basis for the experience of dukkha. "That from which arises ill" (*dukkha*) is craving which should be abandoned with the help of insight wisdom. And making an end of ill here and now is another way of saying Nibbāna.

27. Some more instructions about dukkha. Impermanent things, whether 'me', 'mine' or 'not me', 'not mine', are all unstable and so, unreliable. Do not rely for security on what is not reliable. But isn't that what everyone does? So how much security do we have? "I'm secure" says Mr. Moneybags. (He hasn't read the paper yet, so he doesn't know about that bank vault robbery.) "I'm secure" says Mrs. Largeland. (But she isn't aware that the government will nationalise land holdings.) So who's secure? "I'm secure. Don't want your wealth but I'm sure going to live long." (So says young Bob Cocksure. But how does he know?) Even this body, conventionally called 'mine', is changing all the time and can perish any moment. One has to

see the danger in impermanent compounded things, see them as dukkha so that one's grasping can be unwrapped from them. And they are void too. What does 'void' mean? This is not a metaphysical abstraction but a name for what is *void of self*. What is that? Body is void of self and so are feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. (Just where we think there is self or soul.) They have to be seen with insight as void, empty, ownerless. And dukkha has to be seen in the same way as really poisonous. As it is now, we are attached to a whole heap of dukkha and think that it is productive of happiness. That illusion has to go—to see dukkha as it really is. None of this can be done while the mind still wanders about, in other words, there is no insight unless a person has developed calm strongly first. When a person has succeeded with jhāna, the fully developed Right Concentration, then insight becomes easy. Without strong calm, the 'insight' that people have is either illusory or else so weak as to vanish quickly.

43. When we feel cornered by dukkha, we can go for a holiday, 'a change of air'. While this may make us feel good, it has not really solved the problem. Some who can afford it, with time and money, are always travelling round—"It'll be better there" they say. And they say it again when they get there, about some other place. These days travel is easy, even in the heavens, so escape appears to be easy too but the end of dukkha is never found just by going elsewhere. Everywhere is the same which means all this world and any other. When they die many people (of many religions) hope to go to a heavenly world and they will do so if they die with a somewhat purified and elated mind. They hope that 'heaven' is perfection where dukkha cannot touch them. "But," asks a Buddhist, "how can a conditioned, dependently arisen state of existence be perfectly free of dukkha? Don't you know that 'conditioned' means also 'impermanent' and that in turn signifies 'dukkha'? Your heavenly life may last long and be very pleasant indeed but it cannot possibly be eternal and so is not secure either. The Sensual Realm of hells, animals, ghosts, human beings and heavens—all are "unstable and oppressed"—by dukkha. Then the Realm of Subtle Form—the Brahma-world Heavens gained through the practise of jhāna, even that is all "unstable and oppressed." Further refined are the Heavens of the Formless Realms to which one may attain by practise of the formless concentrations—even such long-enduring states are "unstable and oppressed." These are the three becomings. One may become this or that, here or there, due to one's kamma, but one does not get beyond dukkha. So, where are you going, mind, to find happiness? There is only one answer.

53. Round and round treads the ox, hauling water or grinding grain, just like the untrained mind which takes the impermanent to be permanent, that which is dukkha to be happiness, the not-self as self (or soul), and the unattractive as beautiful. These are the four perversions (or distortions) in which the unenlightened mind operates. No wonder there's dukkha! However, if one makes up one's mind to serve the Buddha by practising as much Dhamma as one can, then the fetters and bonds, including these four, can at least be loosened in this life, and possibly cut off completely. Why be a slave to this ox-like perverted mind?

32. What else is it like? Mind is formless, without any kind of body or material, just a collection of processes. And it is a far-traveller, how far and how quickly it goes in an instant! Supersonic jets are just creaking old oxcarts by comparison with the mind's speed. And mind is "a wanderer alone" since its various processes arise in a conditioned way upon the basis of what has gone before. And when one sees all the troubles that come of mind constantly drawn to the senses, how troubled it is, how lacking in peace and security, then one is prepared to aspire to Nibbāna.

36. Notice the contrast between past lives when the mind's wishes and desires had been followed (leading to further rebirth therefore) and Tālapuṭa's present life in which he is not content to drift with the stream of sense-desires but makes an effort to cut across the current. The sensual mind does not like this and becomes discontented and angry. Tālapuṭa accuses his

mind of ingratitude since he had so long pandered to its desires and thus was forced to live in the dukkha caused by them. Minds (or mental states) are many and various and what appeals to one kind of mind experienced at one point in time may not be at all attractive to another type of mind occurring later. The only way out of such inner conflict is the cultivation of *sati-paṇṇā*, mindfulness-and-wisdom, and the best results are attained when one is guided in this by an experienced Teacher. The more confidence one has in that Teacher the greater will be the efforts that one makes to practise his teachings. This is the best way beyond the ocean of rebirths.

Mind as the Source of Rebirths

37. In these next two verses, Tālapuṭa speaks of the mind as the source of whatever rebirths one has to experience. We make kamma all the time, every day, by every decision, choice or volition. All those kammās have appropriate results inherent in them—and how many of them will it be possible to experience in this life? Combined with our craving for continuity or existence onwards from the moment of death, these kammās can provide the bases for innumerable future lives. We may then become priests (brahmins) or aristocrats, and from among the latter we may achieve rulership as king or president. Lives as merchants or workers are also brought on by an individual's past kamma. Someone is going to say at this point "Oh, you are proposing that rigid old caste structure just as the Bhagavad Gīta does. I thought Buddhists were free of such ideas?" Reply: "In the Buddha's days, brahmins were already imposing their four-caste structure on society as part of a 'divine plan'. The Buddha did not agree with their ideas and made his Sangha of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs open to anyone of any caste. But he knew the truth that past kamma does determine where one is born. It shapes one's inclinations, one's aptitudes and weaknesses. But that one should be completely controlled by past kamma as some believed, is a fatalistic view, making impossible new present kamma. Everyone has the chance to make good kamma now, whatever their birth in this life." They may then gain "gods' estate" in a heavenly rebirth at the end of this life, provided that they have made the right kamma for it, that is to say, been generous, truthful and never angry.

38. Titans or demons are the resultant birth for those who love power and ruthlessness. (One would imagine that some politicians and army people get birth among them.) Power is fine when only one or two have it, so the powerful think, but when reborn in this state, everyone has it. Imagine the constant mauling, brawling and wars, much more a feature of demonic life than this human world! And the hells are more over-populated than this world—by plenty of beings who loved to kill and torture other beings, while they were human. As to animal rebirth, if one wants it then the formula is to take delight only in what delights animals—to make oneself an animal in fact, enjoying only food, drink and sex. Or instead of an animal-man one can be a ghostly man by avaricious hoarding, never giving anything to anyone, and then have to suffer life as a ghost, miserable and beset by unsatisfied cravings. All this is brought about by the mind.

Dhamma to Practise

24. When one knows about this the wise person does something about the wild mind. All the Dhamma taught by the Buddha is for the purpose of taming this mind and Tālapuṭa has mentioned a few useful points in these verses. 'Concentrations' is not really a good translation of *jhāna* for which there is no English equivalent. The formula of the four jhānas had been repeated hundreds of times in the Suttas, while one or more jhānas are also often mentioned. They are the perfection of concentration and the person who possesses ability with the jhānas

has a wonderful inner refuge to which he can withdraw for refreshment and peace. When jhāna has been obtained and mastered there is no need to try to meditate, for one has reached the state of perfected meditation. The four jhānas, for a Buddhist, are not ends in themselves but are the basis for the successful practise of mindfulness leading to insight.

The *faculties* and *powers* are different strengths of the same five factors: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom. If one is to grow in the Dhamma in a balanced way then these factors must be balanced, faith with wisdom, effort with concentration, while the fulcrum is mindfulness. The result of imbalance of these faculties can be seen in the holy men of many religions. The seven *wisdom-factors* lead to Enlightenment when fully developed. They are more commonly called 'enlightenment-factors' and have been explained at length elsewhere.² It is only through the development of deep meditation that they can be matured. The Buddha's Teaching is only made one's own experience through the *Three Knowledges* of remembrance of past lives with all details and particulars; of the workings of kamma, seeing for oneself how evil kamma will bear painful fruits but good kamma's fruit in happiness; and finally, the knowledge of the exhaustion of the taints—the exhaustion of sensual desires, being (existence) and ignorance (of the four Noble Truths). Once it is 'touched' or personally verified in this way, that person is an arahat, one who has finished the job with nothing to strive for, but having seen non-self lives compassionately for others' benefit.

25. Some more Dhamma to grow into. The Dhamma does not grow into oneself—it cannot be changed to suit oneself; oneself the practicer must grow into the Dhamma, that is, adapt to the Dhamma, become the Dhamma. That means changing oneself, which is more trouble and less fun than changing the Dhamma. The Eightfold Path is what one should try to grow into since it leads directly to Nibbāna. Under the heading of Wisdom in this Path come Right View and Right Intention. The first understanding of the four Noble Truths is more intellectual to begin with, deepening with experience to include one's understanding of all sides of life, while the second purifies one's emotions so that relinquishment, loving kindness and compassion dwell in one's heart instead of lust, ill will and cruelty. Whoever lives his life by these two factors of wisdom is a wise person indeed. Moral Conduct covers the next three factors: Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. The first is abstaining from falsehood, malicious speech, harsh speech and idle chatter. Do you pass this test? The second means refraining from killing living beings (non-human included), taking what is not given (which is rather more than theft), and wrong conduct in sexual pleasures (and 'wrong' means causing injury in mind or body to someone concerned). Are you pure in these three respects? The third factor covers all sorts of livelihood which involves hurtfulness or breaking any of the Five Precepts. How is your livelihood? The last section of the Path is concerned with developing the mind: Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, which the Buddha defined in this way: the first is twofold effort: to rid the mind of evil and to cultivate it in goodness.

There are various methods taught for this. The second is mindfulness to be cultivated towards the body, feelings, mental states and mental factors. If no effort is made, no mindfulness will arise. With no mindfulness the last factor of Right Concentration cannot be perfected. This is the four jhānas which have been mentioned earlier. This is a short summary of the Eightfold Path. Only those who are with it in mind, speech and body will make "the utter destruction of all ill."

52. The wrong path then, the one not to follow, is the Ignoble Eightfold Path. How much of your understanding and thought is Wrong View and Wrong Intention? Or how many of your actions of body and speech are Wrong Speech, Wrong Action or Wrong Livelihood? And perhaps you are developing Wrong Effort (for more unwholesomeness), Wrong Mindfulness (to

² *The Seven Factors of Enlightenment* (The Wheel No. 1).

be aware of ways of evil) and Wrong Concentration (upon what leads to sensuality or to destruction)? Using wisdom, one's way is not along this path, but by making effort and becoming restrained from evil, one may be established in the Path, as a stream-winner for instance. This will occur when the causal process of both coming-into-being and passing-out-of-being have been penetrated with insight, at which time one no longer believes in Dhamma but having verified it personally one is actually the Buddha's heir. It is then not the Buddha's Dhamma that one knows but one's own Dhamma, seen for oneself (when 'oneself' has dissolved into the processes of arising and passing away).

Determination

44. "Firm, firm in my aim!" says Tālapuṭa and this is the only way to achieve anything in the Dhamma. Wavering doubts, half-hearted practise, lack of confidence in the Triple Gem, lack of confidence in one's Teacher—all makes for indecisiveness and getting nowhere. People like to see progress in their Dhamma-practise but this will never be seen without determination and firmness of mind which prevents one being deflected on to other matters. When the mind's aim is truly firm then what chance have defiled and egoistic thoughts? Tālapuṭa is no longer in their power and even if they should arise he has enough mindfulness and wisdom not to follow them up, so that they are cut off quickly. Nor can he be misled by feelings and thoughts relating to the body which he compares to something rather dangerous—"a double-ended sack." Or perhaps it is the comedy of relying upon and becoming attached to such a sack which must be constantly filled at the table and emptied at the latrine, that he speaks of here. He goes further: if a double-ended sack is bad enough, what about "a thing filled full and flowing with nine streams?" Recognise it? It is this body which has nine holes: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus and urinary duct. And through these holes flow various sorts of dirt: eye-dirt, ear-dirt (wax), nose-dirt (snot), spittle, phlegm and vomit from the mouth, and excrement and urine from the other two. None of them smell, taste or look good, yet they come from the inside of this precious sack which I proudly call 'my body'. How strange it is!

48. But Tālapuṭa will not be entangled in all this for he is determined to be a master, not a slave, of mind. People wish that their meditation was calm, that their hindrances were subdued, that their defilements were cut off, but their untamed minds are stronger than these wishes and they are slaves to that untamed mind. Tālapuṭa's practise and determination are such that Dhamma is in control, Dhamma is master, while defilements of any sort are slaves which obey orders instantly. That is his inward state. Outwardly he is quite happy with whatever comes—whatever robes, almsfood, resting place and medicines (the four supports of a bhikkhu's life), he obtains, he is satisfied with them. He does not always seek for more and different clothes: his three robes are enough. He is content too with the food people give him and is not concerned with flavours, textures, a 'balanced diet' and so on. Resting-places cause him no trouble or expense—a cave, the root of a tree, a hollow among some boulders, or a small hut provided by generous donors. And when he needs medicines he will be offered whatever is necessary to cure the body, and if not, he is not too much concerned. The catskin bag is an illustration of the necessary energy for taming the mind. It seems that catskin required a lot of work to cure it, to make it supple; so does the mind. For the mind to be supple is meant that one can do with it what one likes. "Oh, today I'll stay in third jhāna for a change"—if he can do so, he has a supple, well-tamed mind.

49. Bull elephants in the mating season can be dangerous. Ordinarily they are very strong, but to this must be added a fiery temper when in rut and it will be a skilful trainer indeed who brings such an elephant under control. A great deal of energy will be necessary—as needed for taming the wild mind too. The wild elephant is used to going where it likes and when it likes.

Nothing can stop it crashing through the forest. In the same way the wild mind goes anywhere, any time and is not restrained at all as it crashes about in the jungle of desires. What has to be done is told in the next verse.

51. "I'll bind you by strength to the meditation base as elephant to post by a strong rope bound." The 'meditation base' is the object of meditation, provided by one's Teacher to fix the mind on, such as Mindfulness of Breathing in and out, Loving kindness, or Unattractiveness of the body. This like a strong post to which the mind is tied by the rope of mindfulness. Slowly, the wild elephant learns that it cannot get away! But it has to be well-guarded, for successful meditation cannot be mixed with what goes counter to it. If it is well-guarded the mind grows with mindfulness, grows to become aware of many things it had not known before. This growth, through insight-wisdom, goes on until the time of penetrating a Noble Path, perhaps of stream-winning. At that moment there is no leaning on, support or clinging to any of the becomings, not to sensual-desire, nor to subtle form, nor even to the formless realm. If the Noble Path which has been entered is that of arahatship, thereafter there is no support at all, no leaning on any kind of existence.

40. Here is real determination! "Today I shall thoroughly restrain it." Tālapuṭa does not say "I'll restrain it tomorrow, or next year, or when I retire, or when the next Buddha, Ariya Metteyya, comes"—he says "*today*." You might say "It's easy for him, a monk living in the wilds, with no family problems, no money troubles... That's all he has to do!" It is true that some places make the mind's training easier, but life in the forest without the comforts that many take for granted these days, is not so easy. More to the point, wherever one is, one is always in the present. That future time when it will be easier to train one's mind is an illusion. When it comes round to being now, it's just the same old now and things have not changed. So there is only one time to start: NOW. Otherwise of course "this wandering mind, a wanderer," will go on wandering where it wishes—from dukkha to more dukkha.

41. Tālapuṭa tells his mind "Get me across the floods!" But these are not of water; far more powerful are the four floods described by the Buddha. First is the flood of sensual desire. Who is not swept along by it? Enjoying life here means to be adrift upon this flood of delight in sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. This first flood not only sweeps along human beings but also all the sub-humans and even laps the devas in the heavens of sensual desire. A mighty flood indeed which is not even recognised by many people who are yet being whirled along in it. The second is the flood of existence (or being), the extent of which is even greater than the first. From the lowest of the hells, through animals, ghosts, humans, gods of sensual desire, and the Brahma gods of subtle form and formlessness, all these beings are borne along by this flood, the desire for existence. A third flood holds all these beings within its bounds too, the flood of views.' 'Views' means beliefs, theories, doctrines and dogmas which are proclaimed as 'true' but which cannot be verified through the practise of sila, samādhi, paññā (moral conduct, meditation, wisdom). Views are a powerful support to the ego ("I believe..."), so that in Thai presentations of Dhamma, one often comes across the combined term *māna-ditṭhi*—conceit (concepts of oneself) and views. It is not surprising that 'views' are popular! Nor is it surprising that the Buddha's Teaching with its emphasis on taming the self, then seeing self as empty and hollow, is strongly disliked by some! And this flood of views has been the cause of innumerable wars and murders, because, of course, I am right and you must be wrong. Views, though they seem intellectually respectable, can rouse terrible passions.

The last flood of all, the flood encompassing all floods, is that of unknowing (or ignorance—of the four Noble Truths). In the power of this flood beings are tossed about upon the ocean of saṃsāra. If they hold that dukkha is experienced because of no cause (acausally), or from one First Cause, or from the displeasure of numerous divine beings, or merely from material change,

then they are lost in the saṃsāric ocean. Even Buddhists who have merely *heard* the Four Noble Truths can only be said to have a distant glimpse of the Further Shore; if they make no effort to practise, certainly they will not get there. Only those Buddhists who are determined to cut down their cravings through Dhamma-practise will approach that shore called Nibbāna. Only when the real causes of dukkha are dealt with will this fourth flood be crossed. Though immense floods to those who do not practise Dhamma, they can be leapt across by one who does so intensively. The mind purified with wisdom does the leaping—no one leaping to nowhere but attaining liberation having done so. None of this will be accomplished until one has seen “this world—unstable, unsteady, lacking any essence.” While one is convinced that this world is stable and steady and very real—to be taken exactly as one’s senses perceive it and one’s mind thinks about it—it cannot be seen with insight, for one will not have the drive necessary to do anything about oneself. This drive is *saṃvega*—being deeply moved or stirred. The Buddha is the teacher who makes one look at the world (=oneself) as it really is; sometimes he compelled a person to look whether he wanted to see or not. For looking truly at the world means perceiving the necessity of change, and changing oneself can be a painful business.

* * *

Delight in the Forest

47. The Rains have just begun after the long dry hot season and the earth which has been bare and brown is now covered by a bright green carpet of new grass. This is the time too when leafless trees burst into flowers of many colours followed by fresh growths of pale green, pink, purple and many other shades.

Tālapuṭa will have been at ease in this season when it becomes cooler, an ease he expresses in the words “like a log I’ll lie.” Someone might say “Sounds to me as though he is living in solitude just to have a doze, a lazy man avoiding work!” Though a log does rather paint a picture of inactivity, even of decay, that is not the meaning intended here. The Commentary says “being ungrasping like a tree he lies down” perhaps indicating that his ease and pleasure is not like the rest taken by people who do not train themselves. They grasp at the concept (or conceit) ‘I am lying down’, along with which can go lethargy and drowsiness and other defilements but Tālapuṭa, having made great efforts, does not grasp in this way. Most people do not find a secluded spot in the mountains “Soft as cotton down,” even if it is covered with “four-inch grass.” But for a meditator who can easily attain jhāna, small discomforts of the body are easily overcome. He is not worried if his meditation seat is hard rock nor delighted if it is a soft cushion. Wherever he is, that is a good place to meditate and since solitude is seldom accompanied by “all mod. cons.,” he is content with things as they come. This is not the mark of an idle person, for while the dull-witted may be able to blot out discomfort by much sleep, the way of the meditator is to become more aware. Aware of what? Aware of the dukkha instead of escaping from it.

18. The mind of Tālapuṭa, like our own minds, is up to its tricks again. “When you get into those cool quiet woods with the rain streaming down and the thunder resounding (believed to be made by the great god Indra or Sakka according to the beliefs of those days, but here rather a poetic embellishment) and an occasional bird’s cry, how joyful your meditation will be.” But it does not always work out like that. Having got to a remote place perhaps one feels bored and wants to return to where there is more sense stimulation. Or perhaps one feels afraid, as though that aloneness was a threat to one’s self (which relies very much upon the support which others give this concept). Again, the woods are attractive when the sun shines and the weather is warm but if one proposes to live there for a long time in all weathers then there may be some hardships to face. And the usual reaction to hardship is to seek enjoyment elsewhere but where

will this be found in the wet woods? Maybe the sounds of “the brightly plumaged birds on Giribbaja’s peaks” will not be sufficient entertainment for such a dissatisfied mind? But Tālapuṭa must have overcome this kind of mind eventually so that wherever he was in the wilds and whatever the condition, he always had equanimity, if not happiness. One good result of meditation is that it makes one able to endure all sorts of conditions which, without the development that meditation brings, one could not bear. A point to check up on oneself! This means that at least one’s temper is even when things do not go as one wishes; or better than this, one is joyful come what may, a result of what one has experienced in meditation. Depression, boredom and lethargy which might be the reactions of some, are all born from the evil root of delusion, while dissatisfaction, anger and grumbling arise from the evil root of aversion. The good meditator is at least as joyful as the birds—and he has much a greater cause for joy than them.

46. The peacock is a very beautiful bird and even his strange cries amidst rocks and cliffs would be arresting. But one must admit that the peacock’s beauty costs him something. All that magnificent plumage is a burden even to walk around in, what to speak of flying! It appears too, that peacocks are only too aware of their splendour and ‘as vain as a peacock’ is as true of the bird as of some people. He struts about and shows off his tail from some prominent perch as though saying to human beings “Poor featherless creatures, do you not envy my plumes?” But when he comes to fly his journey is just a hop from tree to tree. The peacock is contrasted by the Buddha with the swan, plain in colour and lacking any ornaments, but how well and how far he flies! This illustrates how (usually) householders are burdened with their wealth and possessions, so that their spiritual flights go not very far, not very long, while bhikkhus through lack of ownership are able, if they make the effort, to fly far and strongly. At this point maybe someone says, “What about the Lady Visākhā or the merchant Anāthapiṇḍika? They were householders of greater possessions and wealth than most people have, yet they became stream-winners. Nor did they renounce all and enter the Sangha. And besides, there are other examples: Yasa’s father and mother, and Upāli who at first followed the Jains—they were all rich people.” “Ah, but you must not generalise from a few special cases. These people were not ordinary householders for we are told that they had developed their special qualities in previous lives so that when they met the Buddha they quickly penetrated his words.” “But there might be some of them around now so that entering the Sangha is not necessary for them. I might be one! How do I know?” “There could be such people now, certainly. But how you can tell whether you are one or not, probably depends on whether you have been able to meet an arahat and penetrate the truth of his words! And one should not assume that one has such great merits! But in any case, the life of a bhikkhu or a nun is not for everyone. If your karma fixes you in a lay person’s life with the responsibilities and burdens that it brings, then you have to be content to make short hops from tree to tree.” But those ‘short hops’ can carry one far, by regular practise every day. One should not expect arahatship in this life unless conditions, internal and external, are complete for gaining it—this is one extreme view. On the other hand neither should one think ‘I cannot get anywhere’—the other extreme. Just keep on with regular meditation practise, every day for an hour or however long one can spare, with concentrated courses from time to time. A great deal can be done in this way and one will find that the peacock plumes drop off as one goes along.

43. Here are some good places for meditation: the peaks of mountains or their slopes, open spaces, forests or caves. All of them to be suited to meditation, should be unfrequented by human beings. Other beings, boar and antelope are mentioned, may be found there but their presence is not so disturbing as human beings. Animals make small noises and only from time to time, while humans, these days especially, are much noisier with their songs, shouts and transistor radios. Some places which should be quiet, such as caves, can be noisy enough if

converted into a shrine for instance. Tālapuṭa tells himself that it will be fine when he gets to silent places. What his mind actually did is related elsewhere.

51. More mountains and forests where Tālapuṭa hopes to find peace. There are some who would say, “Well, he’s quite wrong to take off for those forests because if he could not find peace where he was, then how would he find it elsewhere?” A Buddhist might answer: “Can you find peace in every place, as much in one as another, or are some places more favourable for meditation?” Most people have to answer that some places are conducive to meditation, others not. The Buddha taught three kinds of solitude of which the first, physical aloneness, is conducive to the second, the oneness of mind in jhāna when the hindrances have been suppressed. This ‘solitude’ in turn is helpful for the final aloneness of the mind which has no more assets (*upadhi*), another way of speaking about arahatship. So if the second is to be attained the first is very useful, as Tālapuṭa found and has emphasised in his verses. Those who do not find that these three sorts of solitude follow one upon another are either people who have developed the first sort of solitude in past lives, or those who are just playing about and pretending at meditation (“Daily life is Zen, you know!” as was once told by a very noisy unmindful person). So there is some reason why one meditates best in quiet and lonely places. In the last line of the verse there is something of a puzzle. Tālapuṭa addressing his mind (the deluded and defiled mind) says “Doubtless, mind, you will perish,” but the Commentary explains “by the destruction of saṃsāra, you will be established.” It is the defiled mind that gives rise to saṃsāra and the latter ceases through the destruction of ignorance and the exhaustion of craving. The purified mind is established since there is nothing that can shake it.

23. Not the place where people on the whole like to dwell—unless on some well-protected tour. Leopards and tigers are thrilling through binoculars or even outside the closed windows of one’s car or coach but people are not so happy at their close approach if they have no weapons. Fear is in their hearts and from fear is born hatred and the desire to destroy. But what can a bhikkhu do? He never even touches weapons and would not use one even if it was to hand. Yet in Tālapuṭa’s days, (down to our own as we find in the lives of Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhuridatta Mahāthera and his disciples), bhikkhus often lived in remote areas where large animals abounded. Often bhikkhus did not even have the protection of a hut as they lived at the foot of trees or in caves. What protection then did they have? Their best protection was meditation, for in proportion to their success in purifying the mind, fear becomes less. When fear and anxiety no longer control the mind then a bhikkhu can live happily in a cave where there are snakes, in a forest where tigers and leopards are commonly seen, or near to the haunts of wild elephants. No bhikkhu comes to grief in such places if he cultivates two things: mindfulness and loving kindness. His mindfulness will prevent him from carelessly treading on snakes (for instance), while his loving kindness will break up fear of other beings. And if he feels the first stirrings of fear in his heart he can always recite one of the discourses suitable for such an occasion. There is the Discourse on the Supreme Banner for “one who has gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, to an empty hut,” in which the cure for fear, trembling and horripilation is the Recollections of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Then there is the well-known Discourse on Loving kindness which by awakening that quality in one’s heart banishes fear. Animals know and fear a man who has fear while they are aware of the peaceful vibrations of the fearless meditator. If one is fearful still of wild animals and knows a great Teacher who stays in such a place, it is a good test of oneself to ask permission to stay there with him. No harm will come to such meditators, as is told in Venerable Ācariya Mun’s life story, while they will learn how to deal with unfaced fears. Some people, from urban surroundings are unable even to keep their calm over large hairy spiders, so what will they do if ‘hailed’ by leopard or tiger? And if one cannot get over these fears, how far can one’s meditation go? In the kinds of situation which we have been talking about, ‘abandoning longing for the body’ becomes rather

easier. There are just not the facilities for pampering the body in such remote places. Whatever comforts are found they are simple, more necessities than luxuries. While longing for the body is strong, again how far can one get with meditation? One is just tied down to this bag of bones by all one's concerns for it. And how much dukkha comes from this! While if one can let go of grasping at it through meditation while still keeping it going through food and medicines, much peaceful happiness can be experienced. Perhaps one will not fail to do this given an inspiring Teacher and aspiring fellow-practicers. Certainly one should not fail to achieve some Dhamma in this life for all the fearful conditions of this world, though leopards and tigers may not be among them, are ranged against the continuance of our lives individually and against the Buddha-sāsana collectively.

* * *

Success

50. The taming of a wild elephant has been mentioned already, but here the untamed mind is compared to a horse which has not been broken in. An animal like this does not agree to go any direction except the one it chooses. Even if it endures a rider on its back it persists in going to the right and left instead of straight ahead, making it necessary to pull on the reins frequently. The untamed mind also does not want to go straight along the Dhamma-path. It is pulled to this object and that arising through the six bases and then prances and bucks about, controlled by subsequently arisen defilements. It has no straightforwardness, no steadiness. Faced with attending to just one subject of concentration, or even just to one event at a time, it is not happy and turns this way and that to find a way out. A tiresome mind! The trainer of this untamed bronco is mindfulness, the mindfulness of the mindful mind. As practise goes on, the wild unmindful mind loses strength and occurs less frequently, while the mindful mind increases in strength, its occurrence becoming normal. The training of one's own mind must precede the effective training of others. Lord Buddha would never have been known as "the incomparable Trainer of tameable men"—one who could tame such powerful or wayward characters as the ascetic Uruvela Kassapa, the parricide king Ajātasattu, or the bandit Aṅgulimāla, even an animal such as the maddened elephant Nālāgiri—if first he had not tamed his own mind. Having perfectly tamed that, he was in a position to tame others. The same applies to his arahat disciples down to the present day: having tamed themselves they are able to help beings. Or in the words of another simile used by the Buddha, a person stuck in the mud can never pull out another in the same plight. But one who stands upon a firm, dry bank can do so. Tālapuṭa after striving with mindfulness compares his mind to a well-regulated horse which is headed straight towards Nibbāna down the path *sīla-samādhi-paññā*. This path is "safe and blissful" he says. Is this true? What brings danger and dukkha in this world? Isn't it the Roots of Evil, greed, aversion and delusion, which make life dangerous and cause sufferings of mind and body? Then you may say "But surely a person on a spiritual path is sure to encounter dukkha as a result of his striving?" This is true but such dukkha is not associated with defilements and danger; moreover, it will pass when the need for striving has gone. No dangers arise from the good practise of moral conduct, nor from well-guided meditation, and the same applies to insight-wisdom. Trouble and tension arise from the lack of these path-factors in one's life, or from the wrong practise of them. This "safe and blissful Path" cannot be won by those who do not guard the mind. If one wants to experience it, then half an hour of meditation in the morning (or attempted meditation), followed by many hours of unmindfulness during the day, will not lead to the desired result. Only if one's regular meditation practise is backed up by a steady effort at mindfulness during the day will there be success. One may be mindful of sense objects: "Careful! That sight (sound, etc.) leads to trouble!" Or else check up on thoughts:

“Mindfulness! These thoughts lead to defacements and dukkha!” Or look into feelings: “These pleasant feelings may lead to lust and greed!” “Watch out! Painful feelings are the basis for anger and hatred!” “Have care! From neutral feelings arise delusion!” Keep on checking up in this way, at work, at leisure, at home; with friends or relations... This is the way to succeed with guarding the mind. As success comes through this effort, so one’s feet are planted firmly on “the safe and blissful Path.”

* * *

Conclusion

Our 'visit' to the venerable Tālapuṭa Thera is now finished. We would have heard his verses and perhaps we would have listened to explanations along the same lines as those presented here. One difference would have been in the directness, clarity and compelling truth of his words, as he was an arahat and had seen Dhamma for himself. Even though he explained points of the Dhamma which we knew about already, his explanations would be fresh and new, as in our own days when one listens to the disciples of Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhuridatta Mahāthera. For instance, though one had often heard the four Noble Truths, yet Enlightened Teachers explain them in words which make one think "Yes, of course! But why did I never think of that?" They are able to phrase their explanations afresh since they have found the pure source of Dhamma, but we are unable to do this as we are bound and limited by words and by concepts about Dhamma.

Another advantage of listening to this 'live' Dhamma is that it can be uniquely fitted to the character of the hearer. Had we been listening to venerable Tālapuṭa instead of reading this book, he might have so taught the Dhamma that we were able to see it as he talked. As he taught, so the Dhamma-truth might have been penetrated until there was attainment of Path and Fruit. He perhaps could have helped us in this way (if we had already helped ourselves by laying down the foundation for such attainment). He would have known what abilities and troubles people had in their hearts, hidden from those who do not have the knowledge of others' minds. Fortunately, this knowledge and this way of teaching (and perhaps attainment while listening too) have come down to the present day among the great Teachers of North-East Thailand. The Dhamma of attainment, as those Teachers say, is still possible, and the Noble Sangha is not yet extinct.

Their way of practise adheres to the ancient tradition from Lord Buddha's days. They and their disciples, and no doubt others in Burma, still hold aloft the light of the Dhamma by which men and women can find the way out of the darkness of saṃsāra—if they are able to and if they wish to. While this Dhamma-light is still bright one can say with real hope for now and the future:

*Ciraṃ tiṭṭhatu lokasmim
Samma-sambuddha Sāsanaṃ*

Long in the world may it remain,
the Law of the Perfect Awakened One.

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