

# King Chulalongkorn and Wat Ambhavana

*Phra Dhamsinghapuracariya*

*Preached to Monks in the Uposoth of Wat Ambhanava on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1989.*

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## Introduction

*In the year 1907, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn made a boat trip from Bang Pa-In Summer Palace to the village of Bang Sadej for the purpose of paying homage to Caksiha Reclining Buddha image in Singburi Province, passing by Wat Ambavana during the trip. At that time the abbot was Phra Khru Bhramanagara Pavararajmuni-Jinasi-ha Bha-nuvatara Sanghapamokkha. He set up the pavilion adorned with flags and banners in front of the temple and chanted the well-wishing prayer. His Majesty ordered the boat to stop. He came up to converse with the abbot and presented his photograph signed as follows:*

*“Presented to Wat Ambavana, 1907. Chulalongkorn”*

*In 1956, Phra Dhamsinghapura-cariya (then Phra Palad Jarun) was acting abbot for a year, before his instalation as abbot in 1957. His Majesty’s photograph was in the temple hall at that time. One day there was a large storm, blowing roof tiles down by the thousands. The storm also blew the photograph down to the river. Miraculously, the photograph floated to and fro in the river in front of the temple for 3 days before Luang Poh went down and noticed it. When he unfolded it and recognized the photograph, he brought it back to have it framed and kept for worship at his residence, where it is to this very day.*

*Later Mr. Charn Kornsriddipa, who was a major force in building Bha-vana-Kornsriddipa Conference Building and highly respected King Chulalongkorn, applied for Royal Permission to erect a replica of His Majesty. Within a budget of 160,000 baht the sculpture was completed and placed in front of the said building, gracing Wat Ambavana ever since.*

*On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1989, Phra Dhamsinghapura-cariya invited his pupils to pay homage to His Majesty. He addressed the Meeting in remembrance of His Majesty's kindness and performed the rites transferring merit to the late King. This year the Chairperson on the laity side was M.R. Khun Ying Panrueng Atthakorn, mother of one of the temple's regular teachers — Dr. Kingkaew Atthakorn.*

**Yesterday commemorated the passing away of His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, who cannot be forgotten.** Thousands of cadets from Chulalongkorn Cadet School have come to be trained here. His Majesty set up that school. It was previously called The Army Cadet School.

We should be thankful for His Majesty's kindness. Having been to Europe, His Majesty realized that larger countries maltreated smaller countries. Thailand could easily be colonized. Larger countries had military power with better arms and war materials. We could not make progress in learning as well as the foreigners. That was why they could maltreat us by slicing our land away bit by bit.

Before the loss of our land to foreign powers, Thailand was substantially larger in area. Kelantan, Kedah, Singapore, Siemriep, Battambang, Vientien, Chiang Tung and both banks of the Mekhong belonged to Thailand. Why do I say so? I used to teach the cadets that we had lost our lands 14 times. Two out of five parts remain with us. We lost three parts.

His Majesty had taken this probability of being colonized into consideration. He visited several European countries, such as Germany, Russia and France. He used diplomatic ploy to protect the country's independence, which has been maintained to the present.

Why do we call his monument a 'horse-riding statue'? So I have heard from old folks that during his visit to Europe, the host brought a horse for him to ride in order to put him to the test. The horse flung and threw. But he could calm it down and rode it back and forth for all to witness.

In the old days, if you were not drawn to be a soldier in the conscription you had to pay a levy of 6 baht a year plus take a monthly turn at being a guard. These people did not have much knowledge. But they had wisdom, stemming from meditation — perhaps.

You can go back to ask your great grandparents if this is true. Did your great grandfather go to take a monthly service turn? I was born in time. My grandfather and grandmother told me that there were few men home. We had to collect dried cooked rice in case of war.

I had an experience of this. If we had cooked rice leftover, we could not throw it away. We had to dry it and collect it in a container. This was handed down from the old days. Just in case the Burmese came to attack Thailand, we could then use the dried rice as provision during the war.

If you had silver coins, you had to bury them so as not to let them fall into the hands of the Burmese. If you survived, you could dig them up again. If you died or were killed before you could use them in that life, in the next life you might dream that someone told you to dig them up. If they really belonged to you, you would get them. If they did not belong to you, then you would not get them. This is the law of karma.

**Military service was modernized through His Majesty's capability and kindness.**

**Slavery Abolishment** was another work of his. People in the old days could easily be enslaved. If we borrowed a tael and could not repay it, we might have to send our child to serve the lender as loan repayment until the borrowed amount was considered repaid. Or, even if we repaid the principal, we still had to send our child to them as interest repayment. This had been the case since the Buddha's time.

Once we had taken the money, even if we only had two plots of rice field, we might have to repay the lender by giving him both fields. They might let us grow rice in those fields and split the crop with them. We might have to work really hard

and get fewer bushels of rice. The rest went to the lender. These things could happen in the old days. On **Chulalongkorn Memorial Day** I would like to remind you of this, especially for young monks who were born just twenty years ago. Elder monks may be able to understand.

Before his reign, if an accused was caught but did not confess, he could be tortured by temple tweezing, nail hammering, flogging or jailing in the chicken manure cell. If someone pierced thorns into your nails by a hammer, it would be so painful as to cause you to confess anything, regardless of the actual truth of it. **That destroyed the good feeling toward others.**

His Majesty knew this well. He knew of cruelty, of using authority in an uncivilized way to persecute the people.

Another old story retold. If there happened to be a murderer, the King would make the judgement in front of the assembly of officers. Once the culprit was sentenced to death, he had to be beheaded at the place that he committed the crime.

Last night I suddenly remembered that when I stayed in Wat Promburi. There was an execution place where Mr. Plod was executed. I did not know where he came from. But he committed a murder at Bang-Nga. So, he had to be executed there.

Prior to the date, the Governor announced that there would be an execution of Plod, the murderer. Citizens could come to witness as a warning not to follow the

same misconduct. There was an official procession taking him around the area for three days and three nights, with the official announcement that people should not copy the bad example. It was retribution on Plod that he had to be executed where he committed a murder. People coming from as far as Ayudhya crowded the temple.

Before the execution, the abbot told me that Luang Poh Im, the pupil of Luang Poh Pao at Wat Thamtako, the first abbot of that temple, gave a special sermon to the convict about the law of karma. He taught the convict not to be sorry that he should be punished since punishment came after he had done wrong to another. It should be regarded as paying the price. The monk asked the culprit to forgive and to be mindful according to meditation method.

After the sermon, the culprit was given his last meal and was due to be executed in the next hour. Offerings for the sacrificial ceremony were prepared to offer to the deities. Old ladies told me that the culprit was in the stock and pillory with ears plugged. Two executioners performed the sword dance. Since he would be dead at any moment one of them told him to think of father, mother, the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. But the fatal severing came from the back. Plod fainted many times while leading him up from the boat, after the official procession.

This was a true story which happened at Wat Promburi. Mrs.Tongdee and Mrs.Tongkam Chaemying told me that they were just children then. They have already passed away, a long time ago. People came from all over the place to witness the execution. It was hard to tell where the tens of thousands came from. It

was before I was born. But the abbot said that Plod's well – accommodating corpse was still at the old hall in that temple. The corpse was not cremated. It was buried deep. After the execution, they threw it down a well. I don't know how many were 'buried' in this manner at Wat Promburi.

After I had been ordained, Plod's ghost came to possess a person. I went to ask him about his life, which he told me and I recorded. I was ordained at that temple. The well still exists. I can pin point it. No one has taken up the corpses from that well for cremation, unlike the well at the tamarind tree at the back of Wat Ambavana. I have cremated about 20. Because there used to be ritual offerings performed there, the tamarind tree had become miraculous. This is the old story retold. Around the tamarind tree in our temple, there used to be an execution place for several years, since the Ayudhya period.

Then came the reign of King Chulalongkorn. He eliminated all these. This type of execution was eliminated. He also removed the official procession before an execution. **His Majesty abolished slavery, eliminated condemning culprits publicly. This was announced by royal decree to be effective all over the Kingdom of Siam.** This decree is still ringing in our ears. We should be grateful and transfer merit to him. I hope that he knows of this through his transcendent faculty.

Later, a curious thing occurred as follows. In 1957 when I came to be the abbot here, there was a terrible gale. The wind blew thousands of roof tiles down from the old temple hall. There were also thunder and lightning. I'm not sure if it

was a miracle or a storm. On that temple hall, **there was a photograph of His Majesty.** He had autographed it, “Presented to Wat Ambavana, 1907.” This was when he visited the Temple of Caksiha Reclining Buddha Image by boat from Bang Pa-In. At that time Phra Gru Bhramanagara Pavararajmuni Jinasiha Bhanuvatara Sanghapamokkha was the abbot of this temple. He was also the Ecclesiastical Governor. There was no Singhburi Province then. There were only the towns of Brahmanagara, Indra, Singha, Sarga, Supanburi, Ban Chang, Ban Tan, Ban Pran Sawaengha, Ban Gum, Bang Ban, Visajaijaᵇ district, Hua Tapan, Kobjao, which moved troops to Bang Rachan Fort.

At that time there were several boat service lines traversing the river, like Po Pracak, Green Boat or Red Boat. The water level was at the riverbank. During the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> month, there was a gale from a weather depression. It rained cats and dogs for 7 days and nights. **The wind blew His Majesty’s photograph down to the river.** The frame went flying to one side, while the photograph rolled up and floated about for 3 days and nights. Water in the river did not circulate. But why did His Majesty’s photograph not floated away. That was very peculiar. The photograph floated down the river a little. Then it floated back up again. I saw it with my own eyes. I had gone down to bathe because there was no tap water then. There was no electricity either. We had to carry our own water. There were a pier for the boat and two landing sheds. We have just rebuilt those. I took a water bowl with me, walking down to one landing, preparing to take a bath. *Then I noticed something floating about. The water was flowing but it floated up the river. Once floating down, it floated up again in a few moments — up and down.* I decided to rescue it. Frankly, seeing a white object afloat, I was afraid that it would be a part of

a human corpse floating along the river. But it was the photograph, raggedly torn. I gently spread it out and pasted where necessary. It was **His Majesty's photograph**, inscribed, **“Presented to Wat Ambavana, 1907.”** His Majesty autographed it with his own hand. I brought it up to be framed and put it in my residence. You can have a look. Wat Ambavana has gradually prospered since.

Later on, a Chinese man, about 40 years old, came with his wife and daughter. I can't remember the details very well. I was young then, 28 years old and had been ordained for almost 9 years. Now I'm 62. You can imagine how long ago that was.

They had brought a ten-wheeled truck to the temple to be anointed. There was neither road nor Bang-Nga Bridge then. People used the boat. But the truck had to come by ferry. Co-incidentally, they built a wooden bridge around that time, using the budget approved by Marshall P. Piboonsongkram.

This old Chinese man, his wife and daughter came from Petchaboon. They drove along without haste and parked around the back of the temple. The place was like a forest then. There were hundreds of palm trees at the back of the temple.

At the pier, several boat lines stopped here like the Canwin, Nilakan, Green Boat, Red Boat, Maroon Boat, Po - Pracak and Po - Pitak. The Luang Nai Rit line came later. This is the old story retold. I went out to anoint the truck for them.

The daughter was in Pratom 3 ready to enter Pratom 4. I can't remember her name. But she was a rather naughty girl. While I was anointing the truck, she went up to sit on my seat, made a scrawl on the photograph by chalk and told children at

the Meeting Hall that it was Sangthong, like the character in the play she had seen. Sangthong wore a similar headdress.

When I came back from the anointing rites, she tossed about with convulsions. Then she sat up to smoke, chewing betel nut with lips protruding. I then asked, “What are you doing?” Her father told me that his daughter had never been like that before. He wondered what had come over her. At that moment the girl sat in lotus posture as if she were possessed.

I asked, “*Who are you?*”

He replied, “*It’s me. Do you remember me?*”

I said, “*What would you like me to remember, young girl?*”

“*Not a young girl.*”

Um! I wanted to test if the possession was genuine. The possessed pointed at the father saying, “*Bring up you daughter well. She has good fortune.*” This was in 1957. I noted every point. Then I pretended to be angry saying, “*What kind of a wandering soul is this, coming to possess people like that. Such a pest.*” Then I asked,

“*Your Majesty, if you are the King’s real spirit, where are you? At the horse-riding statue or where?*”

There was no reply, but retorted like an adult, “*Your reverend, where were you this morning?*”

I said, “*This morning I went to have breakfast in Lopburi.*”

“*Where were you at lunch time?*” He continued to ask.

*“I had lunch at Mrs. Pao’s goldsmith shop in Singhburi”*

*“Where are you now?”*

*“Now I am in Wat Ambavana.”*

*“So am I.”*

Well! I stopped asking then. He gave a clear reply. Then he briefly said, *“Your reverend, before I converse with you, I shall inform the child’s parents first. You bring up this child well. She will become an important person.”* The father said, *“That is impossible. I am so poor. I have only one truck for hire. I can’t imagine how my daughter can become an important person.”* He had come from overseas and could not speak Thai very well. I noted that down. Now that girl has obtained her doctorate degree and lives with her family in America.

*“Now, your reverend, note down what I will inform you.*

*Point 1. This temple will be the destination of government officers and civil servants. There will be a conference hall in such and such a year. It was precisely told.*

*Point 2. What I remembered clearly was that in 1987, his reverend Somdech Toh would come to stay in your Uposoth. Your Uposoth would have to be rebuilt in such and such a shape. I noted it down.*

*Point 3. There will be a meditation centre here. I also noted this down. There is no need to tell. Everything is visible.*

*Point 4. There will be Luang Poo Sang (the teacher of Somdech Buddhacarya (Toh) Brahmarangsi). Those who have faith will bring him here in 1987. This is worth thinking about. I noted every point down.*

*Point 5. Later on, this temple will be changed. The back will become the front. The front will become the back. I also noted that. It has become true. Do you see that? The back of the temple, which used to be a rough piece of land, has become the front. The front has become the back because it is on the river. No one travels in this way anymore. This is His Majesty.*

In 1987, Mr. Seng and Mrs. Pongsri Chaiboon made a donation to have the replica of Luang Poo Sang erected. He was the teacher of Somdech Tow, living in Wat Manijalakhanda.

Mr. Seng and Mrs. Pongsri had a dream. So, they had the replica of Luang Poo Tow sprinkling water erected. The statue represented a saying “*Neither be involved in thatch grass nor be stuck with brethren.*”

*“Holding a handful of thatch grass,*

*Dipping holy water to sprinkle on thy head,*

*Driving away tarnished defilement*

*From your body, there remains a peaceful mind.*” Once defilement is ridden, you will have a peaceful mind. You will do away with sufferings. What Luang Poo Toh said was true. The couple presented his statue in the Uposoth.

A few days later, a student from Nakorn Sawan Teacher Training College came to tell me, “*Luang Poh, I dreamt that Somdech Luang Poh Tow in your temple came to tell me something. He said, ‘Go to tell the abbot that I don’t want to stay in the Uposoth. They pass over my head every day. I want to stay in an ordinary kuti. It can be a small one. Take me out of the Uposoth. Staying there, they pass over my head every day, be it monks or novices.’*”

Well! I was stunned. I wanted the statue to remain in the Uposoth. But more people came to inform me of the same. So, I built the present vihara for him. This was what His Majesty told me earlier.

I noted another point. *More goodwill of the temple will arise. Government officers and civil servants will come here. I did not believe this.* Wat Ambavana was a forest monastery, not an urban one. Who would want to come here? But they have come.

*There will be a large conference hall and a large temple hall. Your temple hall will have 5 porticoes.* I noted this. The architect designed it to have 5 porticoes as in my note.

Next, *there will be more influx of mercy. There will be a Kwan Yin Bodhisatva statue.* That was already given, together with *Poo Komarabhacca.* There will be others like *Phra Sivali* and *the Buddha in the walking posture.* I noted that also. **There are two other points that I cannot announce yet.** He forbade me to speak. This was His Majesty.

Later, Major General Samarth Vaiyavanonda, the ex-Governor of Lopburi Province, and Police Colonel Prajant Brahmbandh, the Superintendent of Lopburi police, came to help construct the Uposoth that was originally built in the reign of King Narai the Great. In the re-construction of the Uposoth, more people from Lopburi than Singhburi came to help. This was another law of karma. The ex-Governor and the Superintendent had later prospered, going high up in their career. Now they are retired.

In the end, Police Major General Samarth Vaiyavanonda who used to be an army officer, a police officer and a Governor came to see me, saying, “*Luang Poh, Can I ask one thing from you? Will you allow me to take His Majesty’s photograph to be reproduced and give to people?*”

“*Yes, you may.*”

So, the photograph was taken to have the black-and-white copies made, in Promburi District. Many copies were made because they were intended to be given away. I went to collect those copies on the back of a bicycle. There was neither car nor boat to use then. It just so happened that it rained on my arrival. I couldn’t take the photographs back. So, I left them there for the night, intending to come back for them next morning.

That night, it seems a fire broke out in the house. The husband and wife combined their effort to put out the fire. They saw a fire burning at the photographs. So, they threw water at it. But it was not a fire. Because they did not know what

was inside the bag, they left it on the porch and passed over it. After the fire, they lit a lamp to see what was inside.

The morning after, they asked me, “*Luang Poh, what is inside the bag that can show a glowing fire?*” They asked for 10 copies. This was how the miracle happened.

Later on, an ex-Singaporean Chinese who lived in Bangkok came to ask if he could make a colour copy of the photograph. **The copy came out blank. He had to make an incense and candle offering while asking permission before he could successfully take the photograph.**

**When he took the photograph to have printing blocks made, the blocks cracked. He had to make an offering while asking permission again. The same blocks became unflawed and colours improved.** Because he experienced these miracles, **he offered free copies** to the temple, reserving 300 copies to give his relatives.

I will leave off here today so that you can all go out for a round of alms. May happiness and well being be the lot of all senior monks and newly ordained monks alike.