

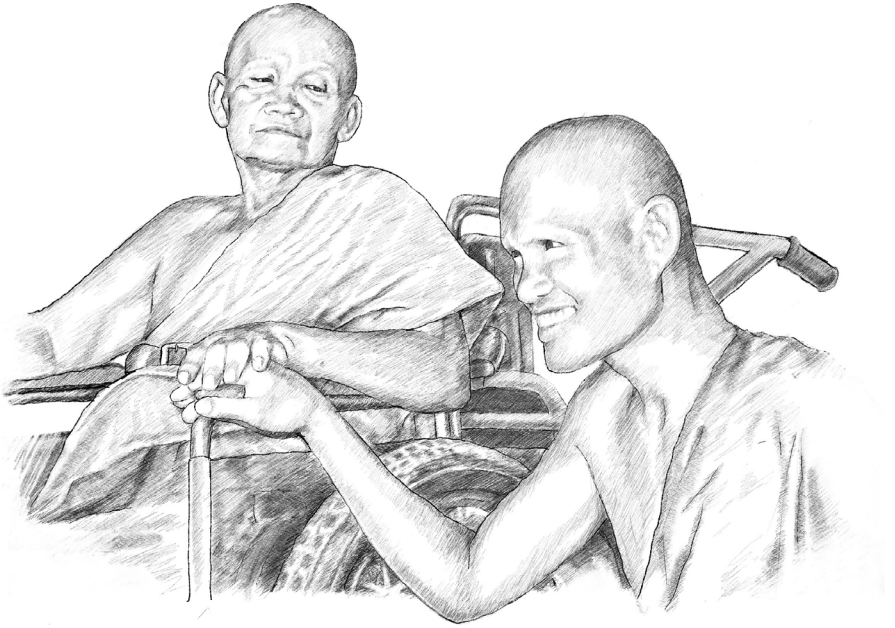
Looking

from the
Right Angle



There is only Benefit
no Loss

Luang for Liem Thitadhammo



**We dedicate this offering
to our beloved parents and teachers.**

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*Looking from
the Right Angle*

There is Only Benefit, No Loss



Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo

Foreword

In the year 2009, Luang Por Liem was invited to visit Abhayagiri Monastery in California. The visit included a variety of travels and meetings with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds living in the US.

Before his return, Luang Por offered a farewell gift of Dhamma which he wrote and read to the Sangha of Abhayagiri. This book contains the original Thai version of that gift and a new translation into English.

Many roads lead to Rome (if we may adapt the old saying) and indeed many roads lead to a higher understanding and better alignment with Universal Truths, known as Dhamma in the Buddhist tradition.

Here Luang Por presents a road which is particularly relevant, valuable and inspiring for our times, the 21st century, the age of globalisation with its vast promising potentials and many grave dangers.

The occasion for publishing this book is the celebration of the new Uposatha Hall of Wat Pah Nanachat — The International Forest Monastery. This monastery was established by the Venerable Ajahn Chah to be a place where people of diverse nationalities and cultures join together to learn and practise Dhamma in a way that exemplifies the brighter potentials of the globalised world.

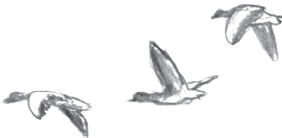
We would like to express our gratitude to the many lay and monastic friends who contributed to this publication. It is our honour to note the participation of two mothers of sangha members, who kindly offered their linguistic and artistic skills.

We acknowledge our limited ability to fully convey the beauty of expression in Luang Por's writing. If there are any errors or misrepresentations they are fully our own responsibility.

May this book help us to adjust our ways of looking at and reflecting on life, so that we develop a more skillful and constructive perspective.

In this way, *looking from the right angle* can gradually transform and uplift our lives.

The Translators,
November 2022



Looking from the Right Angle

The entire world and everyone in it
needs the Dhamma as protection.

We all survive and find well-being in life by depending upon the knowledge, skills, mindfulness and wisdom of countless others. Without these important conditions we would all perish as soon as we left our mother's womb. We would have no food to eat, clothes to wear, or houses to live in.

Our parents, whose faces we have never even seen before our birth, give us life and provide us with the things we need to be healthy and strong. From the very first moments we leave our mother's womb we are already indebted to our parents for our clothes, living places and the various skills we learn.

Actually, we are bound to all people by a shared, incalculable debt of gratitude — to say nothing of our mother, father and all our teachers, to whom the debt of gratitude we owe is surely above and beyond any measure. If we think about it, it is not too hard to see that even the people of different societies have much for which to be grateful to each other.

Knowing and acknowledging the debt we have to others
and placing them above ourselves
is called *kataññutā*.

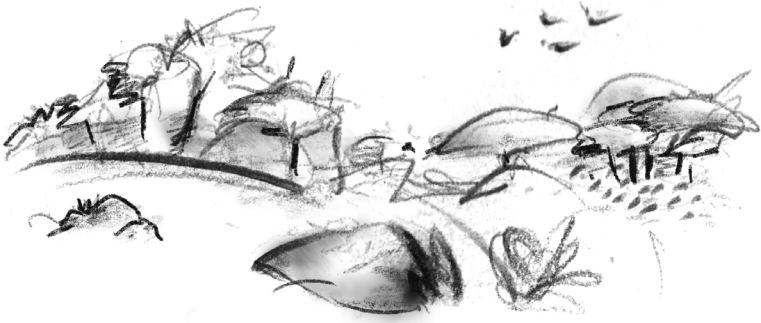
The endeavor to repay our debt
for all that is done for us is called *kataveditā*.

People who recognize
what has been done for them are called *kataññū*.

And those who repay their debt appreciatively
are called *katavedi*.

Kataññū-kataveditā: acknowledging the debt we owe to others and paying it back with acts of gratitude. These are indeed essential, wholesome qualities which protect the world from harm. These qualities nurture and support our world, and lead to its long-lasting peace and happiness.

However, people in today's world are less and less able to see and to realize that we all share this debt of gratitude. This failure of understanding leads to more and more competition, quarreling and conflicts, which only increases social disorder and political turmoil. So taking an interest in the qualities of *kataññū-kataveditā* is indeed of vital importance to us all.



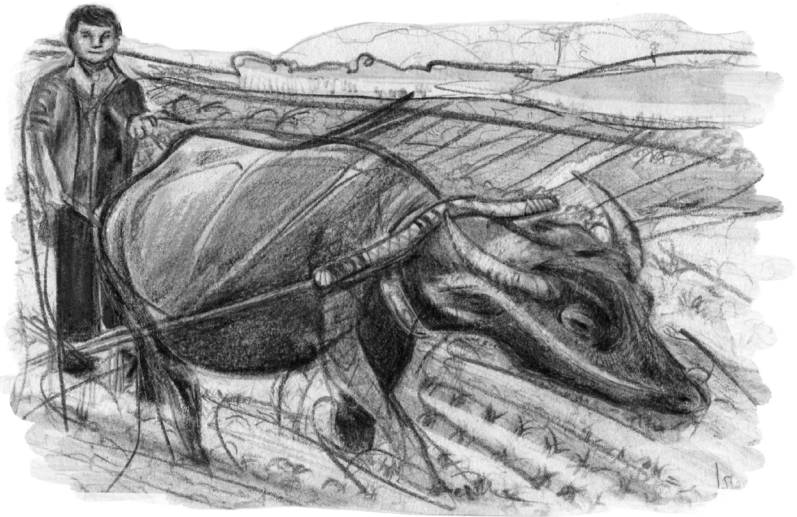
All the beautiful customs and traditions of old have the principles of *kataññū-kataveditā* as an important foundation. These traditions aim to firmly establish these virtues in us, to protect and nurture them, so that they will be long-lasting and ever-present in our world.

Anyone who fails to recognize that our lives are inextricably linked with one another, and does not see our mutual indebtedness, will surely live a life of selfish ingratitude.

As for those endowed with gratitude to its fullest — they see that even cows, buffaloes and all the various animals in the world are of help and benefit to us. How much more so then is this true of our parents and teachers?

If more people could develop gratitude and appreciation for the cows, buffaloes and other creatures of this world, then — by virtue of such open-heartedness — society would thrive with peace and harmony.

Wishing in kindness to repay our debt even to an animal, how could we possibly harm a fellow human being, with whom we share a much closer bond?



Such a society then prospers and flourishes. Its members cultivate wholesome virtues and fulfill the greater potential of the human heart. They will be diligent and skilled in earning their livelihood without intending even the slightest harm to one another.

If we wish to prosper in this way, then surely it goes without saying how deeply we must cherish our parents and teachers. They are the true *devas* who illuminate our lives. They are the *pūjanīya-puggala*: the people worthy of being held high above our own heads and of being truly venerated.

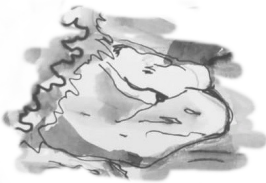


Anyone endowed with a more refined quality of gratitude in life, will naturally feel a sense of true appreciation for the forests, fields, streams and rivers. They will know to value the paths, the roads and many other things that are commonly shared, as well as the flowers and the unknown birds flying here and there around us.

Not recognizing the value of forests, there are those who are destroying them with their narrow-minded selfishness. As a result, our children and grandchildren will have no wood for their houses, and less and less opportunities to rest and enjoy themselves in the woodlands.

Streams and marshes are drying up because the forests, where water reserves naturally gather, are being cut down. Without forests and flowing streams, clouds can no longer form, build up and release their abundant rains. Fruit trees are cut down whole, so their entire worth is then reduced to what can be harvested just that one time.

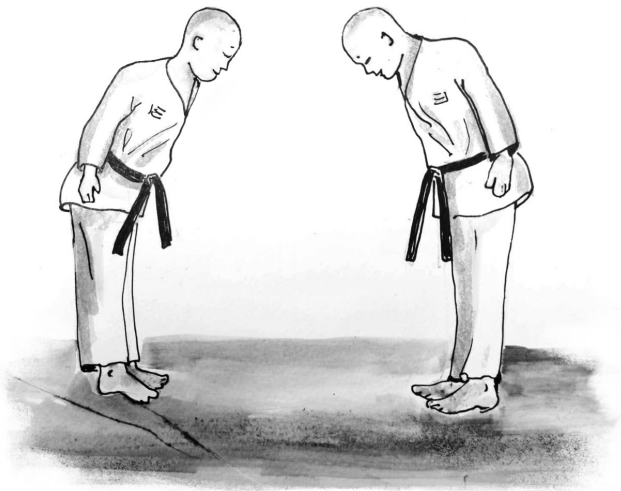
If people simply had gratitude in their hearts, these misfortunes could not happen. The things which gladden the mind would be plentiful all over the earth, and everywhere we would live at ease. Being grateful for all that our planet provides, we would cherish, nourish and preserve its welfare.





With a yet deeper and more subtle sense of gratitude, one is able to recognize and understand the debt owed even to one's enemies, and can feel grateful for life's myriad obstacles.

These obstacles help the grateful person to develop his ability to respond more skillfully and intelligently to life's circumstances. His opponents help him grow in wholesome virtues, such as endurance, tolerance and a spirit of sacrifice.



If we cultivate such an attitude, then envious and jealous people will only help us to develop an upright character. They will strengthen our hearts and bring out the best of our *mettā-karunā* — goodwill and compassion — helping us to develop these qualities to a higher level, above that which is found ordinarily.

With this attitude the manifold obstacles we face will give rise to wisdom, allowing us to see more clearly the world in its true nature. Through learning how to cope with life's challenges we will find a way of living in contentment and ease.

Our various illnesses and difficulties can thus give rise to knowledge and insight. This understanding will then develop until we are ready to truly see and open-up to the truths of *anicca* — impermanence, *dukkha* — suffering, and *anattā* — selfless nature. These realizations lead us to the noble path and onwards to its completion — *nibbāna*.

People without *kataññū* do not know the value of life's hardships. By reacting time and again to these hardships with anger and negativity, they heap peril and disaster upon themselves. It is as if they are digging their own graves.

Their minds know no ease — at times oppressed by their own frustration, at other times bursting with cries and complaints — so their responses and actions go ever more wrong. Indeed, how can they not bring about their own destruction?

However, those who appreciate life's challenges, who gratefully rise up to meet them, bring immeasurable serenity and beauty to the world.

They can make the most demonic of people
become like virtuous monks.

They can change *yakkha*-monsters —
those who are insatiably greedy or angry —
into worthy human beings.

They can turn a stingy person
towards generosity and love of merit,
or make a jealous one
become open-hearted and sympathetic.

Indeed, how can they fail to cause our world
to become like a heavenly realm?

The more we recognize and value our enemies, seeing them
as those who give us life's highest teachings — teachings that
can be found nowhere else — the more we will give thanks
and honor them with our own efforts to embody goodness,
sharing the blessings of our life with them.

There is so much for which to be grateful to our enemies —
people with *kataññū* are very aware of this. Without enemies
or obstacles in life, the world would be empty of truly capable
people. If we know the value of hardships, nothing in life is
received as too bothersome or difficult.

With such an elevated mentality and mature perspective, with this capacity to appreciate those who oppose us and that which obstructs us, the heat from the friction of the world becomes cool.

So consider how even our enemies have been of so much help to us. Then try to imagine the value of our mothers and fathers, our wise teachers and the highest of all objects worthy of veneration: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.



Not a single one of us was conceived in a hollow tree stump. We all come into life in the little empty space of our mother's womb, with the help of our father too. Having been born into the wide world, we have survived to maturity thanks to the daily sacrifices of our parents and of the countless others who have played a role in our lives.

The Buddha and all wise people point to the fundamental role of our parents, honoring them as our primary caregivers. Having brought us forth, they provide us with the support we need to flourish. They are the ones who equipped us with knowledge and skills for living. They nurtured our good character traits and gave us many other things that have brought blessings into our lives.



If anyone's heart is so closed and impoverished that they cannot feel appreciation for their parents, then surely they will never recognize the value of adversaries and enemies.

To be imbued with feelings of gratitude to one's parents is indeed the first and foremost quality of *kataññū*. This is true for every nationality and language, whether in this or any other world. Moreover, those who don't recognize the bond of gratitude with their parents are commonly considered as those in the world who are not to be trusted.



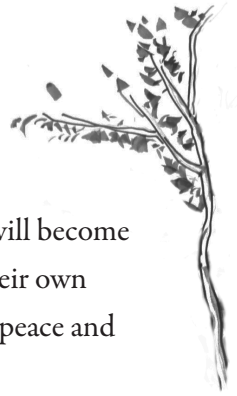
Spiritual teachers are typically those who undertake the task of training and elevating their disciples' consciousness, picking up from where their parents left off and taking them further, to higher levels. This is the unique role given to spiritual teachers in the world.

In order to plant and cultivate heightened spiritual awareness within their disciples, teachers must develop extraordinary patient endurance and resolutely put their hearts into their work. This is indeed the sign of true *mettā*, loving kindness, in a teacher.

Teachers need to constantly train and educate themselves with utmost dedication, so that they will have sufficient resources to instill such qualities as truth, goodness, integrity and dignity in their disciples' hearts. This is indeed the sign of genuine knowledge and wisdom to be found in a teacher.

Teachers must live and serve selflessly. In this way they remain the reliable objects of their disciples' deep veneration, not just spiritual workers to be hired and fired. Thus the disciples, having cultivated a wholesome mind and knowing what is proper, will feel much *kataññū* towards their teachers.





Having developed a mature character, they will become ready to carry on their teachers' legacy. With their own perseverance and living wisdom they will bring peace and harmony to our world.

Recollecting how much good we have received from our parents and teachers naturally makes one want to give in return. This wish can be expressed by doing only that which will be of genuine benefit to future generations.

Disciples will do anything to honor the good name of their spiritual home. They will constantly share the merits of their wholesome actions with their mother, father, and teachers.

The Enlightened One, the Buddha, pointed out that when we reflect upon the virtuous qualities of someone dear to us who has passed away, then our path becomes clear — to cultivate goodness as far and wide as possible. This is regarded as the best way of honoring that dear person and sharing the blessings of our life with them.

So anyone who loves their mother, father or spiritual guide, and who knows the debt owed to them, will be wholeheartedly determined to live in a way which is beneficial to the world.

The Buddha, the Blessed One, is known as the supreme teacher for his ability to train and guide his followers. By developing heightened awareness and a mature heart, they are eventually no longer overpowered by any kind of delusion or suffering. Thus they are worthy of being regarded as *ariyā-puggala*, noble beings.

The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is a path of training and refining our consciousness, raising ourselves up until we reach our full potential and cross beyond the ocean of suffering.

The Sangha — the men and women whose lives are dedicated to following the Buddha's teaching — have handed these truths down over the years until they have reached us here today. They have given us the chance to receive this highest gift as if the Blessed One himself was offering it directly to us.

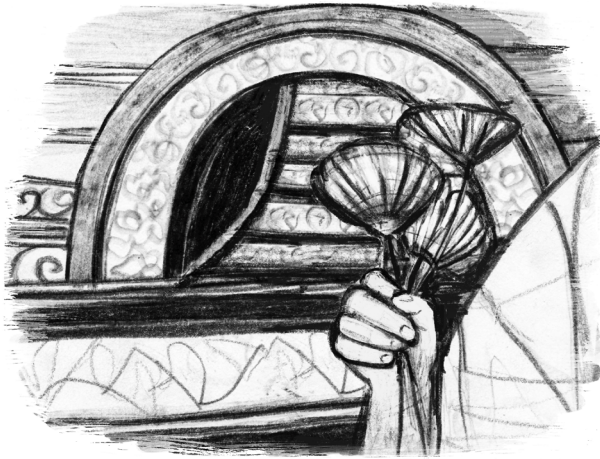
The noble disciples endured all manner of hardships in order to faithfully uphold and preserve the Buddha's dispensation. This was done with a heart of deep devotion and gratitude to the Teacher. We can then say with confidence that this vehicle of learning and practice is our true rightful inheritance, passed down to us thanks to the *kataññūtā* of the noble disciples of former times — those who were determined to live their lives in line with the Blessed One's intentions.

This *kataññutā* of the enlightened disciples has enabled the Sāsanā, the living system of teaching and training, to span the millennia, so that still to this day the world can find relief in the safe, cool refuge it provides. This is due to the many hardships endured and the many sacrifices made by the noble disciples, who were inspired by the spirit of *kataññutā* flowing strong in their hearts.

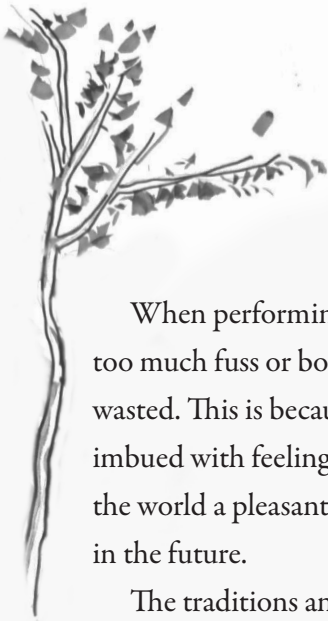


The world is protected by the Dhamma as long as the followers of the Buddha — the community of monastic and lay people alike — keep their resolve to live and practice in line with the principles he taught. In this way we honor and keep his spiritual legacy alive. Thus we see how gratitude protects the world, and so it is most worthy for us all to protect and uphold it firmly together.

In truth, most of the good and beautiful Buddhist customs and traditions have arisen based on the principle of *kataññū-kataveditā*. These traditions were born out of gratitude, kept alive with gratitude, and were intended to instill the virtue of gratitude deeply in the hearts of younger generations, who will then carry it onwards to the future.



Our various customs and traditional ceremonies — such as the cremation of our parents and teachers — have the purpose of suffusing the spirit of *kataññū-kataveditā* within each and every person present. This, more than any other, is the main aim of these ceremonies and it is how they originated, developed and endure.



When performing these ceremonies we don't need to feel too much fuss or bother, or that their expenses are in any way wasted. This is because we see how vital it is for our lives to be imbued with feelings of *kataññū-kataveditā* and how this makes the world a pleasant and harmonious place to live in, now and in the future.

The traditions and religions of every nation, of every tongue, all have these fundamental principles at heart. In our Buddhist culture, we are reminded to take great care that in whatever way we repay our debt of gratitude, our efforts are truly beneficial for society.

In this way, these feelings of gratitude will grow and mature within the Buddhist community and truly lift up people's hearts, bringing genuine well-being to the world.

If we would all come to realize this highly significant truth — that each of us has a debt of gratitude to everyone without exception, even those we see as our enemies — then we would readily compete with one another in carrying out kind and wholesome deeds in the effort to fully pay off the debts we owe to each other.

If the hearts of everyone on earth were truly filled with
kataññū-kataveditā, then doubtless our world
would be more beautiful and inviting
than a heavenly realm,
safer and more worthy to live in
than a heavenly realm,
more honorable and desirable
than any heavenly realm.

Let us consider well that as long as we keep recollecting
kind deeds done to us by this or that person, then we are able
to maintain patience and tolerance towards one another, not
acting impulsively or out of anger.

If we practice bringing to mind our many benefactors —
such as our parents, siblings, aunts and uncles — then we will
not easily act in mean or selfish ways. And even if we do at
times behave hastily or unmindfully, we will be quick to ask
forgiveness and to forgive others as well.

Remembering and honoring the many acts of kindness
done for us, and for those dear to us, can indeed become an
inspiration to care for — and be compassionate towards —
our fellow human beings.

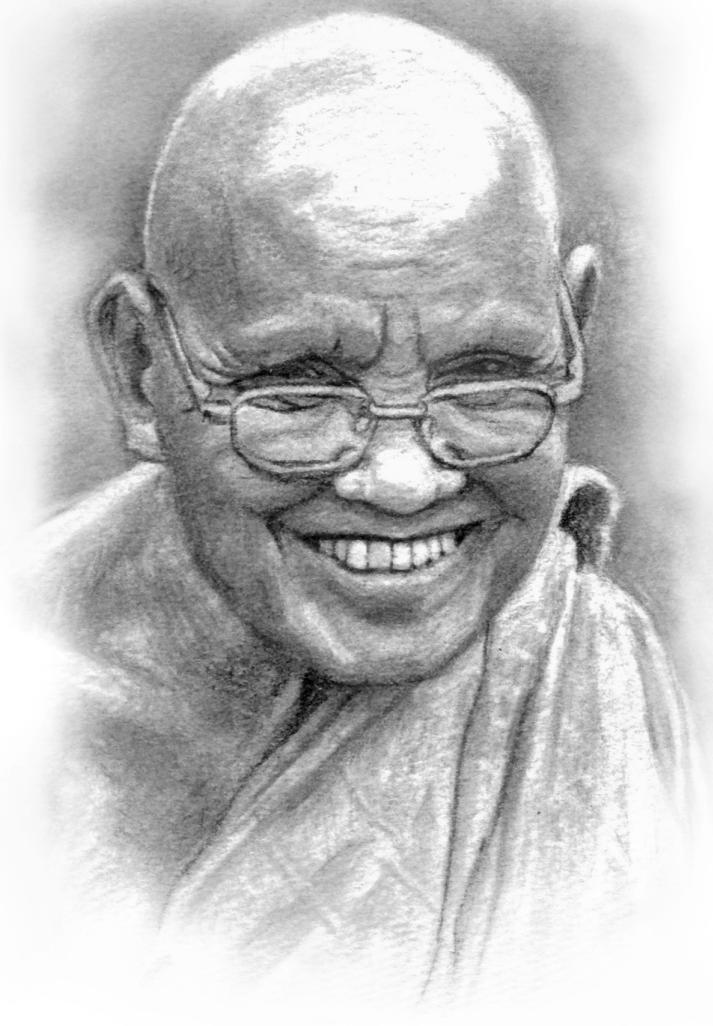
Kataññū, the spirit of gratitude, is a quality of such power that it can transform a *yakḥa*-demon into a true human being. The virtue of gratitude is vital for the survival of our world and for keeping it safe and peaceful, now and into the future.

Then let us all foster and cherish this most precious quality. Joining hands and hearts together, striving to keep it ever present and alive — so that like a widespread Banyan tree or a gracious Bodhi tree, it will provide cool shade and safe shelter for us all.



..only benefit, no loss





Luang Por Liem Thitadhammo was born in 1941 in Sri Saket Province in the Northeast of Thailand. After taking higher ordination as a Buddhist monk at twenty years of age, Luang Por practiced in several village monasteries throughout the Northeast until he joined the Forest tradition in 1969.

He took up the training under Luang Por Chah, who later became one of the most famous monks in the country, and whose reputation and influence has continued to spread throughout the world, even today.

Living under Luang Por Chah's guidance in Wat Non Pah Pong in Ubon Province, Luang Por Liem soon became one of his closest disciples. After Luang Por Chah became severely ill in 1982, he entrusted Luang Por Liem to lead the monastery.

Soon after Luang Por Liem was formally appointed to take over the abbotship. He fulfills this duty up to the present day, keeping the heritage of Luang Por Chah's Dhamma and characteristic ways of monastic training available for monks, nuns and lay disciples.

For the Sangha at Wat Pah Nanachat Luang Por Liem is not only a dearly respected teacher and guide in the monastic life, but has for the last twenty seven years also conducted every monastic ordination ceremony as the preceptor.

