

Ajahn Chah's
Teachings on Nature

by
Pasanno Bhikkhu

Ajahn Chah's Teachings on Nature

One time when I was sitting with Ajahn Chah, I was asked to be a translator for a visitor – a journalist from Sweden. He was interviewing various spiritual teachers and asking the same questions, and, of course, getting a huge range of answers. His questions included: “Why do you practice? How do you practice? And what results do you get from the practice?” My participation as the translator complicated the situation and created a big obstacle. I felt a particular irritation towards the monk from Bangkok who brought the journalist to the monastery. There were also my views and opinions about what I thought were idiotic questions asked by the journalist. This made the situation really interesting because *nothing* slipped by Ajahn Chah.

We sat down and the whole farcical scene started to play itself out. The journalist asked questions, then I translated them for Ajahn Chah. Ajahn

Ajahn Chah's Teachings on Nature

Chah started talking about something else – asking his own questions and talking about this and that. After some time, he turned to me and asked, “What were those questions again?” I had to re-translate them and then Ajahn Chah went off on another tangent. After a while he said, “Did the journalist ask some questions? Oh, what were those questions?” And then I had to translate the questions yet again and, of course, Ajahn Chah went off again, and then asked, “Has anybody got a pencil and paper? Can somebody write those questions down for me?” So we went to find the pencil and paper. Ajahn Chah then asked, “So what was that first question?” I had to translate the question slowly enough so Ajahn Chah could write it. “Okay, *why* do we practice?” Ajahn Chah wrote it down. “What was that second question again?” “*How* do we practice?” “Oh, okay,” and he wrote it down.

“What was that third question?” He wrote it down. Then he looked at the journalist and asked really sharply, “*Why do you eat?*”

Ajahn Chah's Teachings on Nature

That question took the journalist aback, and he responded, "Uhh... I'm not quite sure."

"No, why do you eat?" Ajahn Chah said, "I want an answer to the question, why do you eat?"

The journalist responded, "I eat because I'm hungry." And Ajahn Chah said, "Exactly – that's why we practice. We're hungry – we're hungry for truth, we're hungry for peace, we're hungry for reality. We are suffering, and we're hungry to be able to free ourselves from suffering." And then he talked on that theme, explaining that when you really realize you're hungry, you look around and try to find ways of practice that make sense to you. And the result is that if you are hungry and you find something to eat, and you find out how to make that food and nourish yourself, you will be full; you will be replete; you will be at ease. And that is the whole purpose of practice.