

WOUTER DOORN

# Buddho

Twenty Years of Samatha Meditation  
and the Lessons of My Burmese Teacher

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The author wrote this book in Dutch and English side by side; the translation between the two versions is his own. In revising the text he was helped by his draft readers and by the AI assistant Claude (Anthropic) – for editorial advice, for comparing the two versions, and for corrections to spelling and grammar. Every decision was his own.

<https://buddho.org>

*For Julius and Jasper*



*“When the dhamma slowly reveals itself to you,  
slowly lets its light shine,  
then it is at its most beautiful.”*

— Ahba



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## Foreword by Ajahn Sumedho

*“Follow the one who is wise, insightful, and learned, who is devoted, dutiful, and noble. Follow such a true and worthy person, as the moon follows the path of the stars.”*

— The Buddha (Dhp 208)

I have been asked to give an intro to Wouter Doorn’s book, who has been a disciple of Luang Por Opart, also known as Ahba, for many years.

I met Luang Por Opart at Wat Pah Ratanawan in Thailand over ten years ago. He impressed me as a very composed, very kind, and very benevolent *bhikkhu* (monk) who had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures, and had been practising meditation since he was a novice monk in Burma.

On reviewing his method of teaching, he is a very clear, very wise monk who can be trusted to guide others through meditation. He emphasises the importance of patient endurance, and to develop *samādhi*, which helps to develop wisdom.

I recommend this book. May it be of benefit to all who read it, inspiring and encouraging those who are interested in realising the path of liberation.

— Ajahn Sumedho, November 2024

*Ajahn Sumedho is the most senior Western disciple of the Thai forest teacher Ajahn Chah and the founder of Amara-vati Buddhist Monastery in England, where he served as abbot for many years.*

“I enjoyed reading your manuscript to Luang Por Sumedho. It did remind me indeed of Ahba very much, of his profound wisdom, care, and kindness. You describe him well. I rejoice in your good fortune of having cultivated this relationship with him.”

— Ajahn Asoko, assistant to Ajahn Sumedho

## Author's Preface

*“One may study the texts, recite them, and reflect on them a great deal. But if one wastes one’s time and neglects the seclusion of meditation, one is called someone who studies much, but not someone who truly lives the teaching.”*

— The Buddha (AN 5.73, Dhammavīhārī Sutta)

At the end of my retreat in 2017, Ahba suggested that it might be a good idea to write a book about the *dhamma* – the teaching of the Buddha and the truth it describes – first in Dutch, and later to translate it into English. Prior to publishing, I had to present the text to him to make sure that everything I wrote was true.

The moment I got back home, I immediately and enthusiastically began writing. Within a few weeks, I finished the outline for several texts I planned to include in the book.

After a while, however, something started to gnaw at me. I noticed more and more that I wasn't satisfied with the result. Although I didn't necessarily think the texts I had written were bad, I didn't want to write yet another book in which a lay follower gives his own interpretation of the *dhamma*. There are already plenty of books like that. Somewhat frustrated, I decided to put the whole thing aside for a while and focus my energy on my own practice and my work for our website buddho.org.

In the years that followed, life took over – children, work, a move. It was only in 2022 that some mental space opened up again and I felt renewed inspiration rising. It was time for another attempt, this time with a completely different approach. Within a few days, what took form was a first manuscript that began to resonate more and more. In the months that followed – with many thanks to Herman Schreuder, who repeatedly reviewed my attempts and provided useful feedback – a version was created that I dared show to Ahba.

In 2024, my family and I travelled to Thailand. When we met with Ahba, I showed him my preliminary manuscript. Ahba looked at it calmly, leafed through it, and then

looked at me with a smile, shaking his head slightly: “What is written here is true! But sometimes you still don’t understand.” I had to laugh – and at the same time I knew he was right. He looked at me, nodded, and continued: “If you meditate, then you understand. If you don’t meditate, then you don’t understand.” When I asked Ahba if we could publish it, he replied, “No problem” – for someone who rarely uses more words than necessary, that is a clear answer.

In the months that followed, I was very fortunate to have found Ajahn Asoko willing to read the manuscript to Ajahn Sumedho, who was in turn kind enough to write a foreword. Afterwards, I decided to heed Ahba’s advice to do another retreat, and Herman’s advice to choose the right moment for publication based on my own place in Ahba’s system.

**A note on the Pāli terms:** At the back of this book you will find a glossary of the Pāli terms used. I translate each term the first time it appears, and use it untranslated from then on. If you come across it later and want a reminder of its meaning, I encourage you to turn to the glossary.



## Acknowledgements

*“If you meet a wise person who points out your faults and corrects you, follow such a person as you would someone who shows you a hidden treasure. Associating with such a person brings only good, nothing bad.”*

— The Buddha (Dhp 76)

Although you ultimately have to sit on the cushion yourself, and no one else can do the work for you, you never walk this path alone.

My deepest gratitude goes first of all to Ahba. For his boundless patience, his compassion, and the pure and direct teaching he shared with me.

Without Herman Schreuder I would never have found this system. For years he has guided me tirelessly, and above all he has opened the way to this meditation system

for many others. He has contributed to this book in many ways: he read earlier versions, gave advice, worked with me on one of the chapters, and was its first proofreader. His dedication to passing on Ahba's teachings is an enduring source of inspiration, and what I owe him will not fit into a single sentence.

Anyone on retreat notices little of all that is being arranged around him. Chao Khun Nawin and the monks and lay followers of Wat Chong Kham Phra Aram Luang have done that for me all these years, mostly without my seeing it; and at many of my conversations with Ahba, Maha Ooh sat beside me and translated. Without them, much of what stands in this book would never have reached me, and I thank them warmly for it.

Ajahn Asoko read the manuscript aloud to Ajahn Sumedho, and later went through the final text with great care and gave me valuable feedback; for both I am deeply grateful. To Ajahn Sumedho my thanks for the kindness of his foreword.

It began in my parents' bookcase: that is where I found my first book on Buddhism. I thank my parents and my sister Karlijn for the warm family I grew up in, and for the

respect that has always been shown at home for the path I took from there.

Merel, Julius, and Jasper have lived closest to all of it. I thank them for the space and the understanding whenever I went on retreat again or disappeared behind my screen to put these experiences on paper – and Merel besides for reading the text. It requires at least as much patience to live with someone who walks this path as to walk the path oneself.

Finally, I thank Bob, Rick, Aster, and Liam, who read the finished text with a sharp eye. You told me how it came across and where it did not yet run smoothly; your feedback has helped to keep these texts clear and clean.

May this book be an encouragement to all who wish to build their own foundation, step by step, slowly but surely.



# I. PREPARATION



# The Intention

*“Whatever intention arises, the mind bends in that direction. When I saw this, I set a firm boundary within myself: thoughts of desire and aversion I let go of immediately, until my mind was inwardly stable, calm, and concentrated.”*

— The Buddha (MN 19, Dvedhāvitakka Sutta)

Nowadays, people want everything fast, fast, fast. Even when it comes to the wisdom the Buddha taught. They try to run along the Buddhist path instead of taking it one step at a time. Repeatedly, my teacher Ahba has made it very clear that this is not how it works. There is no shortcut, no faster way – not even for modern people who are so very busy with other things. This urge for results, for immediate

insight, is essentially nothing more than a new desire, forming one of the greatest obstacles on the Buddhist path.

For those who really want to progress, there is only one way: meditation without a desire for results, just trying again every day. Then, sooner or later, the result will come naturally, in this life and otherwise in the next. And when the *dhamma* slowly reveals itself to you, slowly lets its light shine, so Ahba says, then it is at its most beautiful. With this, he follows, without any doubt, the path the Buddha taught two thousand five hundred years ago, the gradual path to liberation (Ud 5.5, Uposatha Sutta):

“Just as the waters of the great ocean have but one taste, that of salt, so this *dhamma-vinaya* (teaching and discipline) has but one taste, that of liberation ... Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch; in the same way, this *dhamma-vinaya* has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual practice, with a penetration to true knowledge only after a long stretch.”

Ahba fully embodies this path, and teaches it tirelessly. With this book, I hope to convey a fraction of the feeling you get when sitting in front of him by sharing some of the

lessons he gave me, and thus I hope to contribute to the practice of anyone who wishes to venture forth on the journey of the slow and patient development of the mind.

Be warned, however. This is not a standard Western secular book in which everything must align with our ordinary everyday perception and ways of thinking. Although I myself was trained scientifically and regularly looked at certain Buddhist teachings with some caution, by now, my personal experience is that our everyday perception is in reality very limited. Ahba's path is the *dhamma* as the Buddha taught it. I am well aware that this path has dimensions that fall far outside the familiar framework for many Western readers. Yet I have chosen not to filter or adjust the reality of my practice to fit a secular worldview. In this book you will therefore encounter elements that may create some friction – such as the influence of heavenly beings, ancient meditative languages, and capacities that awaken in a pure and concentrated mind.

Of course, you don't need to believe any of this in order to appreciate the core of Ahba's teaching; you can only truly know such things by experiencing them yourself. Until then, you can simply take note of these aspects and

set them aside. If you ignore them, that is perfectly fine too. I only ask for a willingness to travel with a calm and open gaze into the layered reality of this Burmese tradition, exactly as I was able to discover it step by step.

A Burmese student of Ahba once told me that he had visited all the great *Sayadaw* (Burmese honorific title) in Myanmar after Ahba had fled, in the hope of finding a worthy replacement for the teacher he had lost. He did not find one. What struck him most about Ahba was that he tailors his teaching entirely to the listener – to be even more specific: to the *pāramī* (spiritual perfections) the listener has accumulated, and to what is needed to help develop those *pāramī* further. Ahba is able to do this – so his students believe, including myself – through the deep *samādhi* (concentration) he has built up through his long practice of *samatha* meditation (concentration meditation), with which he can see these qualities in the student.

I mention this because it has an influence on the lessons Ahba gave me – lessons that were sometimes directed at me personally and almost always took place in the context of a retreat.

With a book it is not possible to tailor the message in the same way. I have therefore decided to try to make the setting in which the lessons took place somewhat more tangible by sharing some of my retreat experiences, and to choose those lessons which I think will be most valuable to the greatest number of readers. I hope that a description of the moment and the context helps to put the content into context. But ultimately it is up to you, the reader, to investigate which lessons are most personally relevant to you, and to let them slowly but surely resonate within you.

There is a great deal of repetition in the lessons I received. This is probably related to my own stubbornness, which presumably led Ahba to find it necessary to emphasise the same points again and again. Yet this repetition has, for me personally, contributed greatly to my understanding over the years. Because I suspect there are more stubborn people in the world, I have chosen to reproduce these repetitions in this book.

Ahba's way of teaching is very direct. In English he usually speaks in short sentences, with simple words and tangible examples. But in all honesty: when his lessons were translated by others from Thai into English, the language

remained more or less the same. In Thai too he chooses a simple, direct way of teaching. For people who do not know him and cannot see the non-verbal aspects he communicates, the literal words are probably somewhat difficult to follow. I have therefore taken the liberty of elaborating Ahba's sentences a little, simply to make them somewhat easier to read.

Ultimately, however, the most remarkable thing is the power of Ahba's mind. This becomes especially clear when you yourself have been meditating intensively for some time. When Ahba speaks, he knows no doubt; he sees reality and shares it with you. With complete calm and with endless patience, he gives you answers to questions you have asked, answers to questions you have not yet asked, and lessons that you can only understand and appreciate years later. You are not told what you want to hear; you are told what is true and what is important. What is always emphasised, however, is that it does not help if you only listen. You must practise yourself, meditate yourself, see for yourself. That is the only way. As Ahba says: "You choose, your mind chooses. You have to do it yourself, see it yourself. Very patiently, very slowly but surely."

## Who is Ahba?

*“It is rare to be born as a human being. Hard is the life of mortals. It is rare to hear the true teaching. And extremely rare is the encounter with an awakened one.”*

— The Buddha (Dhp 182)

Ahba is the reason this book exists.

I started practising his system under Herman’s guidance in 2005, and visited him for the first time two years later. During one of those early visits, he apologised to me: “Sometimes a teacher becomes very famous and doesn’t have much time left for his disciples. I’m very sorry.” At the time, I didn’t know what he meant. Now I do.

That is Ahba. His first thought was not for himself, but for the person sitting in front of him. To understand where