

Chapter V

Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

This research has been conducted to study the Buddhist meditation retreats suitable for foreigners in Thailand. It includes four case studies: Wat Mahādhātu (Section 5); the Middle Way Meditation Retreat; International Dhamma Hermitage (IDH), and Wat Pah Nanachat. The purpose of this dissertation is threefold: to study Theravada Buddhist meditation, to study Buddhist meditation retreats for foreigners in Thailand, and to develop a suitable model of Buddhist meditation retreats.

The first objective of this dissertation was to study Theravada Buddhist meditation. There are two kinds of Buddhist meditation, tranquillity and insight meditation. In addition, factors that support the practice are severing the ten impediments (palibodhas), having good friends (kalyānamitta), finding a subject suitable to a temperament. Buddhaghosa explained in the Visuddhimagga that factors favourable to mental development (sappāya) are suitable abode (āvāsa-sappāya), suitable resort (gocara-sappāya), suitable speech (bhassa-sappāya), suitable person (puggala sappāya), suitable foods (bhojana-sappāya), suitable climate (utu-sappāya), and suitable posture (iriyāpatha-sappāya).

The second objective is to study Buddhist meditation retreats for foreigners in Thailand using four case studies and to develop a suitable model. The study of the Vipassanā Meditation Centre at Wat Mahādhātu (Section 5), Bangkok, shows that it uses techniques based on the four foundations of mindfulness as described in the Mahāsatipatṭhānasutta. For the foreign participants, the centre focuses on mindfulness

of body and feeling because the other teachings are too complicated for them. However, if the practitioners have meditation experience, the instructors can give them more in-depth explanations. In general, most practitioners visit this centre because of recommendations from guide books such as “Lonely Planet”. The analysis of factors supporting the retreat shows that the centre has a good instructor/suitable person (puggala sappāya) or kalyānamitta - and it provides suitable food (bhojana-sappāya). The centre also teaches walking and sitting meditation which are both suitable postures (iriyāpatha-sappāya). Nevertheless, this centre has drawbacks as a suitable abode (āvāsa-sappāya) and as a suitable location (gocara-sappāya) because of noise from the streets in the neighbouring area. The suggestions for this centre to achieve a good model are the following: It should train many good meditation instructors who have knowledge of both practice and theory in English; it should have a human resources development program; it should provide training for monks, staff and volunteers; it should provide a new, bigger building and better facilities; it should advertise more, especially on the Internet, and have a booking facility; it should hold separate classes for young students, old students and people on sightseeing tours; and it should be stricter on the rule of silence, banning cell phones during the retreat. The evaluation from the temple concluded that the centre should have a plan to develop human resource and a plan to develop a new facility but the main problem is lack of staff to implement the plans.

The Middle Way Meditation Retreat uses “Meditation Devices” called the light kasiṇa (āloka-kasiṇa) to teach the practitioners. However, a sign (the mental object) such as a crystal sphere is used instead of using the light in a hole and the mantra used is “Sammā Arahaṃ” or “Bright and Clear” for non-Buddhists. Most practitioners find out about this meditation retreat by searching on the Internet at www.meditationthai.org and by word of mouth. This meditation centre has suitable abode (āvāsa-sappāya), suitable resort (gocara-sappāya), suitable speech (bhassa-sappāya), suitable person (puggala sappāya), suitable food (bhojana-sappāya). The

centre does not teach walking meditation but does encourage the practitioners to keep their minds at the centre of their bodies instead. On the down side, there is some disturbing noise from the community in the mornings. The suggestions for this centre are to develop both teaching monks and the staff by providing more intensive meditation training. In addition, advertising is needed to increase the number of participants and provide access to all people. The centre should improve online technology. The centre should develop more meditation programs and increase supplementary programs such as maintaining good health using meditation. They also should offer the program in different languages, not only English, and open retreats in more countries. Furthermore, the centre should offer consistent training for staff members and career paths. The centre agrees with the suggestions and has already improved some facilities and has a plan to develop its human resources and a plan to establish meditation retreats in many countries.

The Dhamma Hermitage (IDH) meditation's instructors teach mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), which focuses on steps one to four out of sixteen because they think that the other steps are too complicated for them. Most practitioners hear about this centre through guide books such as "Lonely Planet" and through magazines such as "the National Geographic". The analysis of factors supporting practice shows that this centre had suitable instructors (*puggala sappāya*) and suitable speech of the instructors. As for the analysis of suitable food, it shows that the centre should have more variety of foods for the practitioners. It also has a suitable climate and it provides suitable postures for the meditation practice. In the other hand, there is some noise from the neighbouring area that makes it an unsuitable abode. Furthermore, the centre provides the silence retreat and serves only Thai-vegetarian food, and there are some rules are too strict. As a result, about 10-30 percent of the practitioners are frequently quitting the course before the end. The suggestions to achieve a good model for this centre are as follows: It should have more English speaking meditation instructors; it should design a meditation room that prevent noise from neighbours; it

should provide documents for non-native English speakers so that they can understand the teachings better; it should set up retreats in other provinces; and it should set up retreats for experienced practitioners as well. Moreover, the centre should provide training programs for the instructors and the staff. In the evaluation from the IDH, the centre agreed that it should have good relationship with the community to reduce the noise problem. The centre also wished to set up an advanced course but lacked the human resources to do so. In addition, the centre had no policy to advertise or set up branches in the other provinces. If anyone wants to set up a retreat and follow IDH concepts, they can do so with no legal problems. The program has not been copyrighted.

Wat Pah Nanachat (WPN), is the International Forest Monastery in Warin Chamrap, Ubon Ratchathani province, in the Northeast of Thailand. At this temple, no single meditation technique predominates. However, mindfulness with breathing forms the basis for most formal meditation. This temple is primarily a training centre for foreigners who are preparing to take ordination. Most practitioners hear about this temple through guide books. The analysis of factors supporting practice shows that this temple is a suitable abode and provides suitable food even if only one meal a day. Yet, many insects in the rainy season make it difficult to stay in the temple at that time. Furthermore, there is no formal meditation teaching. Practitioners have to ask the teaching monk questions if they do not understand the meditation practices. In addition, there is suitable posture and suitable climate at this temple. The suggestions to achieve a good model for this temple are as follows: It should have a scheduled group meditation for lay people; it should update and develop its website; it should promote and advertise the temple's ordination program; it should provide a meditation program for women. Many people are interested in meditating there. Therefore, the temple should establish a schedule for the meditation retreat. In addition, in the rainy season, the accommodation area is messy with tree leaves, and broken equipment. The temple's staff and volunteers should repair the broken equipment and clean that

area. The temple also should brief practitioners when they arrive about the meditation teaching or give them guide lines. The temple agreed with the suggestion to set up a meditation practice for women but there are no nuns there to implement the retreat. There are not enough people to repair the temple in the rainy season but temple officials said they would make repairs when they had more volunteers. Furthermore, the temple had no policy to set up more meditation retreats or conduct advertising. It said it would focus only on the ordination program.

In summary, meditation retreats and temples with meditation practices for foreigners should separate classes in different levels: for visitors who are interested in meditation and wish to learn about it but are not yet ready to practice it; the meditation retreat for beginners, intermediates, advanced meditation practitioners, and set an ordination programme. In addition, they should also apply the concept of sappāya or the factors favourable to mental development to support the retreat.

5.2 Suggestions

5.2.1 Suggestions for the Meditation Retreat

1) The meditation retreat or temple should find a more appropriate location separated from Thai and foreign group. It should have a private meditation area. Sometimes the retreat centre has to share the meditation area with Thai group, so the site is too crowded and difficult to keep quietly. The centre should separate the schedule for Thai and foreign programmes; thus, the centre will not be too crowded for meditation. In addition, the retreat centre should prevent insects from entering some sleeping area or even the meditation hall. The centre should also communicate with the nearby community in order to reduce noise from radio broadcast during meditation practice.

2) The government and Buddhist Universities should create a suitable model for suitable abode during meditation practice and send officers to support temples or meditation centre.

5.2.2 Suggestion for Further Research

It is recommended that it is difficult to make comparative of the meditation retreats because they are located in different areas, different period of retreat, different group of practitioners, different purpose, and so forth. Therefore, further research could be done on quantitative research on suitable model for Buddhist meditation retreat for Thai people and foreigners. It should survey and interview all practitioners at the centres. Furthermore, the guideline model could be test in order to make the suitable for national model.

In addition, there are many interesting studies that could be done on the following:

- 1) The factors favorable for Buddhist meditation retreats for Thai and non-Thai,
- 2) An analysis of Dhamma teaching at the meditation retreats,
- 3) An analysis of the environment used for Dhamma teaching,
- 4) A developed model for international meditation practice.