

A MEMORIAL DISCOURSE
SEVENTH DAY RITES
FOR JOSEPHINE CLARK KING STANTON

by
SOMDEJ PHRA NYANASAMVARA

At; The Consecrated Assembly Hall (Uposatha) of Wat Bovoranives Vihara
On: Thursday, 1st October 2524/1981 at 18.30 p.m.

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA
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Homage to the Exalted One, the Worthy One, the Fully Self-Enlightened One.

ANIMITTAMANAÑÑĀTAM̐	MCCĀANAM̐ IDHA JĪVITAM̐
Devoid of omens, unknown	is the mortal's life here.

With these words of the Buddha we can reflect on the unexpected death of a respected lady, Josephine Clark King Stanton, for whom seventh day rites are now being held. Josephine Stanton was the wife of the late Edwin F. Stanton, the first American ambassador to Thailand. When she and her husband arrived in Thailand in 1946 they set to work on postwar reconstruction. In this work Mrs. Stanton played an important role. It was she who selected the present grounds of the Embassy and of the Ambassador's Residence, and it was she who restored them from the neglect they had suffered during the war and then managed the running of the household.* But Mrs. Stanton was not merely an ambassador's wife. During the next eight years, while her husband tended to affairs of state, she tended to the needy. In her own right she was an eminent philanthropist. She devoted herself to the handicapped, and helped to found and promote the School for the Blind and many vocational training projects. She was unfailingly generous to those in need. Following her husband's death in 1968 Mrs. Stanton returned to Thailand and thereafter lived here for half of each year. Her many friends both here and in America were saddened, therefore, to learn of death in a motor car accident in Connecticut, U.S.A., on last Friday.

Mrs. Stanton was a person of enormous energy, intelligence, and openness of spirit. When she returned to Thailand, immensely saddened by her husband's death, she had the purpose to study and practice Buddhism. She wished to achieve the awareness and mind control she felt to be essential to a free and tranquil life. She began coming to Wat Bovoranives and took as her meditation the four Brahmavihara, or divine abodes, that is to say, friendliness, compassion, joy for others, and equanimity.

* Details of this are found in Mr. Stanton's book, *Brief Authority*.

Of her meditation experience, according to the writings of Mrs. Sumalee Viravaidaya, she has said : "I have found quiet joy and a pervading sense of tranquility. Concern with self subsides and gives way to an awareness and understanding of other people. Resentment begins to fade. I have found that daily meditation also sharpens the memory and enables me to think much more clearly. I have learned so much, but I know I have much much more to learn".

During this time she established the English-language Dhamma Class at Wat Bovorn which still meets every Monday and Friday at 6 p.m. She also introduced many people to the Buddha's Teachings and guided them, in their early development, to suitable teachers. Many foreigners who later became novices or monks were first given help and encouragement as laypeople, sometimes for months or years, by Mrs. Stanton.

But she did not restrict herself to meditation. Her practice of Dhamma led her to continue her work for the blind and handicapped and also to visit and help the unfortunate foreign people who are in Thai prisons.

During the eleven years in which Josephine Stanton stayed in Thailand after her husband passed away she was concerned at all times with how to live according to the Buddha's Teaching. Now I would like to speak to you about this matter. It is a very important question. How does one live according to the Buddha's Teaching? It is important because at every moment of our life we can choose how we will live, whether for our well-fare or for our ill-fare. At every moment we can choose to live according to Dhamma. At this very moment, right now, we can make that choice. I invite you to do so.

Let me tell you this, please. There are three kinds of life. What three? There is the life that is bad, there is the life that is void, and there is the life that is good. How should one live a life that is bad? One can do this very easily, by living so as to make trouble for others and trouble for oneself. By making trouble one can live a bad life. The more trouble one makes the more successful he is at living a bad life. This is called "living a bad life".

How should one live a life that is void? To do this, one does not need to make trouble for oneself or for others or for both. The life that is void is not so difficult as that. All that is needed is to do no good. This means doing no good for oneself and doing no good for others. Then one can claim to be of no benefit to anybody. The more useless one is in this life the more void his life is. This is called "living a life that is void".

How should one live a life that is good? This is the simplest of all. Simply be of benefit to oneself and of benefit to others. To be of benefit only to oneself and

not to others is one way to live. To be of benefit only to others and not to oneself is another way to live. But the Buddha has declared that the highest way of living a good life is to be of benefit both to oneself and to others. The more benefit we can be the better our life. This is called "living a life that is good".

Now we have to ask ourselves, how can we be of benefit to ourselves and to others? What do we need to do? For even in a good life there are many steps or levels of development that can be described. One way of explaining these in brief is by the Righteous Eight-fold Path. What is this Path? It consists of Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation. This is called the "Righteous Eight-fold Path".

Is this too complicated? We can make it simpler. We can say that this Path has three parts: to be of benefit by doing the right deed, to be of benefit by training the mind, and to be of benefit by achieving wisdom. In this way of looking at it, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are of benefit because we do what is right. Right Speech is simply speaking truthfully, not speaking slander and gossip. The Buddha tells us that we are born with a broad-bladed sword in our mouth, and that if we use this weapon of the tongue we will cut others and ourselves as well. Only if we are skillful with the tongue will it be a tool for good. Right Action means not to take life or cause harm or steal or commit adultery or make trouble with the body. And Right Livelihood means to be honest in all our business dealings and not to cheat. It also means not to engage in the kinds of business which cause harm, such as dealing in intoxicants and other harmful drugs.

The benefit by training the mind means Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation. Right Effort is always striving to increase our good qualities and to decrease our bad qualities. The Buddha set the highest example of Right Effort when he sat down under the Bodhi tree and vowed not to move from that spot until he had achieved final liberation. With that Right Effort he was able to succeed in his aspiration. Without Right Effort none of the things we strive for will ever be achieved, but with Right Effort success is possible. Right Mindfulness means to always be aware of what we are doing, not to let the mind wander into the past or the future. If we are not aware of what we are doing how can we hope to succeed? So Right Mindfulness is very important. Right Concentration means meditating regularly in order to make the mind strong and pliable so that it will be able to break through old habits and see the way things really are.

Seeing the way things really are is to be of benefit by achieving wisdom. This is Right View and Right Thought. This means seeing the Four Noble Truths. These truths are, first, that beginning with birth, and right on through old age and death, this life is suffering, dissatisfaction, anxiety, problems and troubles. Second, that the source of this suffering is desire. Third, that if desire can be given up then suffering can be given up. Fourth, that the way to give up this desire is by following the Eight-fold Path that I have just explained to you.

Josephine Stanton tried to learn and practice the Teaching of the Buddha in order to achieve the excellent and noble life for herself and those around her. She achieved calmness and happiness through her practice. Her body deteriorated, her eyesight failed, and she knew she would become blind in the near future, but she remained calm and active as usual. She did not yield to fear or despair because she had established herself in the life that is good, the life that is of benefit to oneself and to others.

The Buddha tells us, in the Dhammapada :

Soon, alas ! this body will be felled
and, senseless, will lie sprawled upon the earth,
cast aside, its consciousness dispelled
like a log that lacks all worth.

The body is impermanent, then. Josephine Stanton died. How could it be otherwise ? But the Buddha also tells us that there is an escape from this, a way of becoming free of the impermanent, by becoming free of attachment. And He tells us that we should develop the four Divine Abodes of friendliness, compassion, joy for others, and equanimity. Josephine Stanton developed and made much of these Divine Abodes. In her memory let us to-night meditate upon these four supreme virtues. Let us remember :

May all beings be free from enmity, may they be free from harm, may they be free from troubles, and may they protect their own happiness.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings not be parted from the gains they have won.

All beings are owners of their actions, heirs to their actions, born of their actions, related to their actions, and abide supported by their actions. Whatever action they do, for good or for evil, of that they will be the heirs. Finally, I would like to recite to you the Verses for the Dedication of Merit :

May the merit made by me now or at any other time be shared among all beings here infinite, immeasurable. Those dear to me and virtuous, as mother or as father, the seen and the invisible, the neutral and the hostile, to beings established in the world on any of its three levels, in any of the four sorts of birth, with five constituents or one constituent or four constituents, wandering in realms great or small. My dedication of merit here, may it provide them with joy. And may deities announce this to those who do not know of it. By rejoicing in this cause, this gift of merit given by me, may beings all live in an ever-happy life and free from hate, and may they find the Secure Path and may their good wishes all succeed.

Those who wish to help her work continue may make donations in Mrs. Stanton's memory to the Edwin F. Stanton Memorial Fund at the Siam Society, for their collection of books on Buddhism, and also to the Christian House of Education for the Blind at the Edwin Stanton Memorial Library, Khon Kaen, Thailand, in support of vocational education and books for the blind.

Donations may be sent to the Honorary Treasurer of the Siam Society at 131 Sukhumvit Road, Soi 21, Bangkok, or given at the ceremony here.