

Interview with Ajahn Kovilo

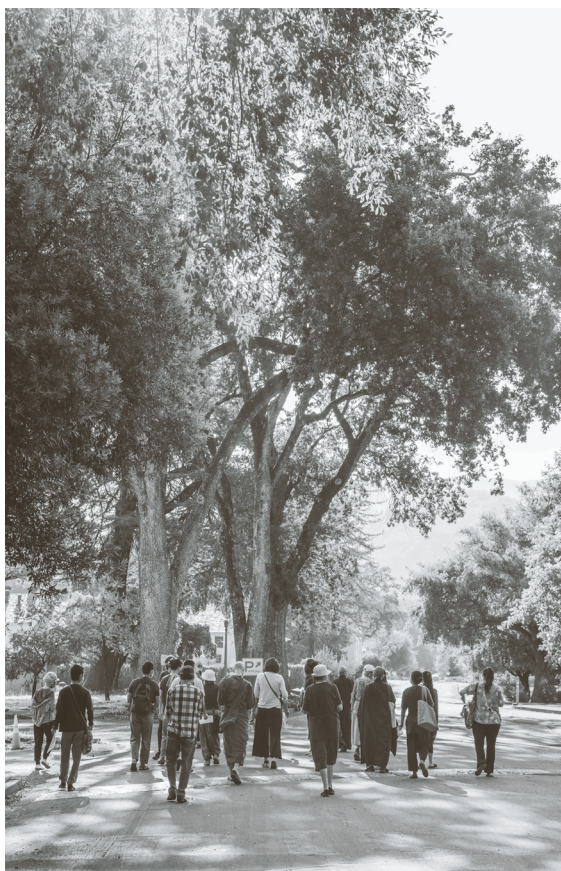
與阿姜·科維洛（知達法師）訪談記

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Ajahn Kovilo, a fully ordained American monk in the Thai forest tradition for over ten years, joined Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) BA program in 2020. [*Bodhi Bikshu gave him a Chinese Dharma name, Zhida (知達 Zhīdá)*] He did his first meditation retreat at age twenty, and discovered that observing his mind was a whole other level of education that went much deeper than the academic classes. He dropped out and eventually life led him to the monastery. Now he's back in school!

Question: How old were you when you first had your spiritual aspiration?

Ajahn Kovilo: Though I was raised Unitarian, I first started reading spiritual books of my own volition when I was eighteen. After high school, when I could actually choose what I could read, I started reading more and more spiritual

阿姜·科維洛法師，是泰國森林派傳統中受具足戒10多年的美國比丘。（註：尊敬的菩提比丘，給了法師一個中文法名：知達。以下用此中文法名。）於2020年，註冊成為法界佛教大學（後邊以法大簡稱），學士學位的學生。他在20歲時，參加了他的第一次靜坐共修，他發現通過觀察自己的心，是另一種層次的教育，比學術課程要深入得多。因此他輟學了，最後把他的人生帶入了寺院。此時，他又回到了學校！

問：當你第一次有修行的志向時，你幾歲？

知達法師：我是成長於一神論的環境，但我第一次開始自願地閱讀關於靈性的書籍，是在18歲的時候。高中畢業後，當我真正地可以選擇我能讀的東西時，我開始閱讀愈來愈多關於靈性的書籍。我認為，在我開始閱讀時，甘地（聖雄甘地）算是我最初的精神導師之一，或者說他是用著靈性的語言來述事

books. Gandhi (Mahātmā Gāndhī), I think, was one of the first spiritual teachers, or someone who's talking a spiritual language, that I started reading. I could get into him because he bridged social activism, which I was getting into at that time, with spirituality. And then from reading Gandhi, I started reading Henry David Thoreau, and from reading Thoreau, started reading the *Bhagavad Gītā*. And then, *the Dhammapada*. My favorite class at Hampshire College in Massachusetts—the university I attended when I was about twenty—was “Religious Experience and Literary Form,” a world religions class. So I read primary texts from all of the major religions. After some time in University, pretty much all of my outside-of-class reading turned to spiritual books and I began to lean more and more in the direction of Eastern spirituality: Hinduism and Buddhism.

And then, in 2003, just before my sophomore year, when I was twenty-one, I did my first Goenka “Vipassanā Meditation” retreat. And that really turbocharged my spiritual inclination. I mean, everyone is doing ten hours of meditation... everyday... for ten days straight! It just shifted my way of seeing things in a truly profound way.

On such a retreat, throughout the course of the ten days, you get to see the power of the mind and the weaknesses of the mind in utter contrast. At the time, I had no idea how to control the ups and downs I was experiencing there each day. One day, I'd fall into a hellish mind state and the next day it'd be heaven. And during the peaceful parts, it was amazing to see how happy the mind could be without any external form of distraction or pleasure—just sitting there with my breath. And those states of happiness seemed a lot happier and more content than the tuned-in and plugged-in states of pleasure, which I was used to.

And then, on the flip side of that, seeing that, not knowing how to train the mind, I can fall into really sad and kind of self-pitying or obsessive mind states, and saying, “Wow, this is a whole other level of education, which is going so much deeper than the academic classes that I was taking in University at the time.”

So I'm like, wow, I want to do more of this, because this is like a real practice. Spending even just one day

的人；甘地將社會運動與靈性結合起來，我當時也正在從事社運，所以我可以理解他的信念。然後從閱讀甘地的書開始，我之後開始閱讀亨利·大衛·梭羅的書，從梭羅之後又開始閱讀印度教經典《薄伽梵歌》。爾後又閱讀佛陀所說的《法句經》。在美國麻州漢普郡學院（我20歲左右就讀的大學），我最喜歡的課程是「宗教體驗與文學形式」，這是一門世界宗教課。

因此，我閱讀了所有主流宗教的主要經文。在就讀大學一段時間後，我幾乎把所有的課外閱讀都轉向了靈性書籍，我開始愈來愈傾向於東方靈性的方向：印度教和佛教。

然後，在2003年，就在我大二之前，當我21歲時，我參加了我的第一次葛印卡「內觀靜坐」共修。這真的激發了我要修行的志向。我的意思是，每個人都花10個小時靜坐……每天如此，連續10天！它改變了我，讓我以一種真正深刻的方式看待事物。

在這樣的共修，在整個10天的過程中，你會看到心的力量和心的脆弱，形成徹底的對比。當時，我不知道如何控制我每天在那裡所經歷的起起落落。頭一天，我會陷入如地獄般的精神狀態，第二天就如在天堂般似的。並且在平靜的時候，令人驚訝的是，看到心是多麼快樂，毫無任何外在形式的分心或愉悅所致——我只是坐在那裡呼吸。那種快樂的境地，似乎比我從前習慣於隨時收聽收看和使用電子產品的即時樂趣，來得更快樂更滿足。

然而，在另一方面，我看到的是，我不知道如何馴服這個心，可能會突然陷入極度的悲傷、自憐或強迫思維狀態。然後說：「哇！這是一個完全不同的教育層面，它比我當時在大學裡上學術課要深入得多。」

所以我想，嗯！我想做更多這樣的事情，因為這才像真正的修行；即使只花一天時間像這樣靜坐，似乎也相當於兩週的

meditating like that seemed equivalent to maybe two weeks of university classes. I felt that the academic classes I was taking just couldn't compare to the intensity, and the depth of insights I was experiencing while sitting with my own mind, quietly, in a room full of other people who are doing the same thing. So I'm like, okay, shift my trajectory.

Question: What made you decide to return to college and study at DRBU?

Ajahn Kovilo: It was in 2020, after I'd been a fully ordained monk for over ten years, that I decided to come to DRBU. For a forest monk in the tradition I ordained in, attending university—even a Buddhist one... even DRBU!—was definitely not the norm. It's very unusual, actually. I mean, in Thailand, if a monk in the Ajahn Chah tradition decides he wants to go to university, then he is, in some formal sense, no longer considered an Ajahn Chah monk for the period that he's at the university. That is an overarching decision that the Sangha there made.

Here in America and the West, that decision hasn't really been so formalized. I think this is mostly just because most Western Theravāda monks either finished their university studies before ordaining or have no interest in academia. As far as I know, it's possible I am the first monk in like forty years of the Western Theravāda Sangha that has gone to university, which seems kind of hard to believe.

Deciding to attend DRBU has been a very intentional shift of focus. So far, I have been finding the shared inquiry at DRBU to be much more approachable and interesting than the pedagogy of just memorizing certain facts that is common in many of the traditional monastic universities in Southeast Asia.

I never thought about university for the first ten years being a monk, probably not even once. In 2018 and 2019 while on two different walking pilgrimages with two different monk friends, I came to visit CTTB and attended classes—mostly masters degree classes—

大學課程。我覺得我正在上的學業課程，無法與我所體驗到的專注力和洞察力這種深度來相提並論。況且是我靜靜地坐在一個屋子裡，而滿室都是在做這相同事情的人。所以我想，好吧，改變我的人生軌跡。

問：是什麼讓您決定重返學院，並在法大學習？

知達法師：2020年，在我受完具足戒十多年後，我決定來到法界佛教大學。按照我所受戒的傳統，對於一個森林派傳統僧侶來說，上大學——即使是佛教學院……甚至法界佛教大學！絕對不是常態。實際上，這是非比尋常的。我的意思是，在泰國，如果一個阿姜查傳承下的比丘決定上大學，那麼在某種形式上，在他上大學期間，他就不再被認定為一個阿姜查門下的比丘。這是當地的僧團所訂出的重大決議。

在美國和西方，這一決議尚未正式化。我認為這主要是因為大多數西方南傳僧侶，要麼在受具足戒之前就已經完成了大學學業，要麼是對學術界沒有興趣。據我所知，這似乎是有點難以置信，我可能是40年來第一個來上大學的西方南傳僧人。

決定來法界佛教大學入讀，是一個非常有意思的重點輪調。到目前為止，我發現法大的共同探索分享學習的教學法，比在東南亞許多傳統佛學院中常見的僅記某些名相的教學法，更加平易近人，也更感興趣。

在我成為比丘的頭十年裡，從未想過上大學，甚至可能一次也沒有。在2018年和2019年，我分別和兩位僧侶道友，進行不同路線的步行朝聖時，我來到了萬佛聖城，並且上了幾門法大的課——主要是碩士學位的課。雖然當時我還沒有考慮就讀這所大學，但我想，這課程真的很有趣。我很欣賞課堂上所提出問題的質量，這些對話真的很有趣。

但後來，在2019年末的時候，我去了泰國，住在一個非常嚴格的寺院。我一心決定到這所寺院的原因是，這座寺院是緬甸上座部的傳統，他們注重在許多正式集體靜坐；因此，每天有八到十個小時，都以小組的形式在禪堂裡進行禪修。這與泰國森林派傳統不同。

at DRBU. And though I was not yet considering attending the University at that time, I was like, this is really interesting. The conversations were really fun, and I appreciated the quality of the questions.

But then, later in 2019, I went and lived in a monastery—an extremely strict meditation monastery in Thailand. The reason I went all the way to this monastery was that in this Burmese tradition they emphasize lots of formal group sitting meditation. So these eight to ten hours a day are in a group format in a meditation hall. That's a different format from the Thai forest tradition.

Generally, in the Thai forest tradition, monks come together for an hour or an hour and a half of group meditation, then go on alms rounds, eat together, and then the rest of the day until evening meditation, we're off by ourselves at our own huts practicing according to our own inclinations. And that personal practice can be meditation—certainly a lot of monks do spend a lot of their time meditating. But for some monks, it's study. That's how I spent a lot of my time. I liked studying in the library according to my own schedule. In a typical Thai forest monastery, the practice is more like a pot, which is just constantly on a simmer.

But in the Burmese monastery, because everyone was meditating in a group format, I found that really helpful. The group practice there was like a container... a pressure cooker, really. In a pressure cooker, you're sitting for eight hours a day, in a room with the same people every day. It's like a pressure cooker on medium boil.

Then COVID came, and the Thai government gave instructions that monasteries should no longer meet in a group setting. But still there was the expectation to keep meditating... but there was no container. So my energy got a bit frazzled, and at that point, I started thinking: I want to be a monk for the rest of my life. But this way of practice is not sustainable. If I'm going to be a monk for the rest of my life, and suppose I live another forty years, then if I'm just in university for four years, it's not that long of a time. And I will be able to keep my rules in the university. What's there to lose?

So I wrote and asked for an admissions form. Probably my first serious thought about this was in maybe May of 2020... In August last year (2020), I came back from Thailand and entered

一般來說，在泰國森林派傳統中，每日清晨，僧侶們會聚在一起，進行一個小時或一個半小時的集體禪修，然後去托鉢，再一起用齋。從午後直到晚間的禪坐之前的這段時間，我們根據自己的根性在各自的小茅棚裡修行。這些個人修行當然可以是禪坐——當然，很多僧侶確實也花了很多時間在坐禪。但對於一些僧侶來說，這是研習經典的時刻。這就是我花了很多時間的方式，我喜歡按著自己所訂的時間表在圖書館裡研習。在典型的泰國森林派寺院裡，這種做法更像是一個慢鍋，只是不斷慢慢地小火燉煮。

但是在緬甸寺院裡，因為每個人都是集體禪坐，我發現這對我真的很有幫助。那裡的集體禪坐練習，就像一個容器——壓力鍋，真的。在壓力鍋裡，你每天坐八個小時，每天和同樣的人靜坐在一個禪堂裡。這就像一個中火的壓力鍋。

然後新冠肺炎來了，泰國政府發出規定，寺院不許群聚。雖然可以禪坐練習……但是我壓力鍋沒有了，所以我的衝勁變得有些疲憊渙散。在那一刻，我開始想：我要我的一輩子都是比丘。但是現在這種修行方式是無法維持的了。如果我打算在我的餘生中都是一名比丘，並假設我能再活40年，那麼，我如果只是在大學裡待四年，這也不是很長時間；並且我還能夠在大學期間遵守我的規則，有什麼是可失去的？

所以我寫了一封信，要求一份法大入學申請書。我第一次認真地思考這個問題是大概在2020年5月。去年（2020年）8月，我從泰國返美並入學了。這是我的寺院生活重心的轉移。它甚至是我無法預料到的方式所呈現出來的深刻見解。所以是的，這是



into the program. It was a shift of monastic life focus. It's been insightful in ways which I wouldn't have even predicted. So yeah, long answer.

Question: Have you encountered any challenges in studying at DRBU?

Ajahn Kovilo: I guess it's a learning curve. In a forest tradition monastery, there are a lot of teachings from the senior monks and in books to the effect of, "Close the books, read your own mind." And sentiments like, "The real practice is when you're by yourself, and the books are in another room." But for me, I just get a lot out of studying. But [with] that door of study [being] closed, I never really gave myself permission to study and that's just the way that I picked up the training and the teachings. There are other forest monks who do find systematic ways to study the things that they want to study, but for whatever reasons, I just never really gave myself that allowance. So in university, though I'm expected to be studying, I love it.

I respond very well to external encouragement: when what other people expect from me is what I expect from myself, I flourish. And that's the situation here at DRBU for me right now. DRBU wants me to be studying, and to be meditating and cultivating, and I'm doing all these! So I feel good about the way I'm spending my time.

And some things are easier to internally push than others, like keeping the monk's rules. I can upkeep them. Like my monk friends, I keep the rules all the time. But meditation is not always so straightforward. I mean, you

長的回答。

問：你在法大的學習過程中，遇到過什麼挑戰嗎？

知達法師：我想就是這個學習曲線。在森林派傳統寺院中，有很多的教誨是來自於長老和經典，這影響是：「闔上書本，讀你自己的心。」像這樣的觀點是：「真正的修煉是當你獨處時，書則在另一房間裡。」但對我而言，我只是從研讀中得到這些教導。可是，隨著研讀之門的關閉，我從未真正地允許自己修習，這就是為什麼我要選擇修習和教導。雖然有其他森林派的僧侶，確實也找到了系統性方式來研究他們想學習的東西；但無論出於什麼原因，我從來沒有真正地給自己做這樣的允諾。所以在大學裡，雖然我被指望著要學習，但我喜歡它。

我對外界的鼓勵反應良好：當別人對我的期望和我對自己的期望值一致時，我就會成長茁壯。這就是現在我在法大的情形。法大要我讀書、坐禪和修行，我正在做所有的這些！所以我對自己花時間的方式很滿意。

有些事情比其他事情更容易由內心來推動，譬如遵守比丘的規矩。我是可以保持這一點。就像我的師兄弟一樣，我一直遵守規矩；但對於禪坐，並不總是那麼簡單。我的意思是，你真的看到了，當你開始把自己推向極限的時候。比如，你習慣於每天靜坐一個小時，並試著強迫自己坐一小時零五分鐘，那麼在接下來的五分鐘內，你會看到你的心，所有念頭都是

really see, when you start pushing yourself where your limits are. If you're used to meditating for an hour every day, and you try to push yourself to sit for an hour and five minutes, then within that next five minutes you see all of the tricks that your mind will use to get you out of the meditation posture. And so you see the limits of self when you're meditating in such a direct way. It's really humbling, actually. And if you have really high expectations for yourself like "I'm going to meditate for ten hours a day," the mind can really smack you down... then pick you up... then throw you down again.

Question: Have you experienced any difficulties studying another kind of Buddhist tradition?

Ajahn Kovilo: Oh, for sure. I mean, that's the hardest. The most challenging classes I have had here at DRBU so far have always been reading Mahayana texts. Like there's a term which Sigmund Freud uses called the "narcissism of small differences." For me, I can read Greek texts or other things for Western classics, or even Indian classics, and not really feel so challenged, but Mahayana texts, there's so much which is similar enough... but which is slightly different, that my mind has often really felt challenged by those texts. There are a lot of things which are kind of posed as being the right view in Mahayana, which are seemingly framed as wrong views from a Theravāda context.

Our first Buddhist Classics class was all on Theravāda texts for the first three months. And then we started reading *the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*. There are some things in that which are very challenging to orthodox Theravāda views, like "*There is no suffering, no accumulating, no extinction, and no way. And no understanding and no attaining.*" I mean, that's like the exact opposite of the Four Noble Truths (Cattāri Ariyasaccāni), which is like the foundation, the ground, of Theravāda Buddhism. Basically, if we were going to have a mantra in Theravāda Buddhism, it would be, "There is suffering, there is accumulating; there is extinction, there is a way! And there is understanding and there is attaining!" The exact opposite! So you read these texts, it seems like they're saying, "No, Theravāda is wrong. Theravāda is wrong in this way and that way."

But out of faith in the Master Hua and the Dalai Lama, and with the idea that "There is something beneficial here in

在哄騙自己放腿擺脫打坐的姿勢。所以，當你下這樣指令的方式靜坐時，你將看到自我的界限。事實上，這會讓人更謙遜。假如你對自己有很高的期待，好比「我每天要靜坐10小時」，那麼你的心會把你打倒……然後把你扶起來……然後再次又把你扔下去。

問：你在學習另一種佛教傳統時，遇到過困難嗎？

知達法師：哦，當然。我的意思是，這是最難的。到目前為止，我在法大上過最具挑戰性的課程，一直是閱讀大乘經典。這種現象就像西格蒙德·弗洛伊德所用的一個術語叫做「對微細差異的自戀情結」。對我來說，我可以閱讀希臘文本或關於西方古典文學，甚至印度經典，這些並不會真正令我感到那麼具有挑戰性。但是，對於大乘經典，雖然有太多相似的東西……但略有不同的是，我的思維經常受到這些經文的挑戰。在北傳佛教裡有很多觀點被認定為正確的見解，但是從南傳上座部的語境來看，這些所謂的「正見」似乎被框定是錯誤的見解。

我們的第一堂佛教經典課，在前三個月都是在研究上座部的經文。然後我們開始閱讀《般若波羅蜜多心經》，這其中有些理念是對正統的南傳觀點相當具有挑戰性，譬如「無苦集滅道，無智亦無得。」我的意思是，這就像與上座部佛教基礎、根本的四聖諦（Cattāri Ariyasaccāni）完全相反。基本上，這如果我們要在上座部佛教裡有一個咒語，那就是：「有苦集滅道，有智亦有得！」這確確相反！所以當你讀了這些經文，它們似乎在說：「不，上座部錯了。上座部這樣那樣都是錯的。」

但是，出於對宣公上人和達賴喇嘛的信心，並且懷著「《般若波羅蜜多心

the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*,” I have kept trying to let go of my biases. I recollect, “These people are wiser than I am, smarter than I am. Find some benefit in this, Kovilo. Maybe I’m not holding this right.” And I could feel it, the attachment. I can feel my attachment to my own view of things. And every time during those classes, studying the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*, when I would say something, I would be speaking from this—an attached mind, and it was just painful. Every time I would say something, I would be speaking from this Theravāda hardcore view. And it’s like, “Oh, Kovilo, why did you even open your mouth?”

So I try to remember, “Does it not say in Pāli Canon—there is nothing which is worthy of clinging to?” And knowing that that’s a fundamental part of the Buddha’s teachings, I can let go a bit. But then, I’d latch on again to some other view, some other certain perspective or certain idea of Theravāda right view. And being attached in that way... It didn’t feel good. I mean, I’m suffering. I’m making myself suffer.

For a while, I would chant that text every day in morning meditation. And I was just winding myself up. So yeah, basically I had to get some perspective, “Okay, Kovilo, forget about the body of the text. Just go to the mantra. Can you use the mantra as the heart mantra, the *Prajñāpāramitā* mantra, *gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā* (which basically just means ‘Gone gone, thoroughly gone, to enlightenment. Hooray!’) And, yes, I want that. Gone! No attachment! No attachment! No attachment! Awakening! Yes! I can say that over and over.”

So I just took that as my skillful means every time, “Kovilo, when you want to say something in class about how this is wrong view, and the Buddha didn’t teach it, or some stupid thing like that, just recite that mantra instead.” And fortunately, I never said anything vulgar. But I would instead just recite the mantra and, after a while, that attachment did lessen.

But the attachment is still there, and I have been seeing it pop up this semester from time to time studying more Mahayana texts. But as I read more and more—the *Sixth Patriarch Sutra* for instance—I’m just really loving it. Really loving it. ❀

經》中有一些有益的東西」的理念，所以我一直在試圖放下我的偏執。我反思：「這些人比我有智慧，比我聰明。知達！就從中找到一些益處。或許我沒有把握住這個重點。」我能感覺到它，那種執著。我能感覺到我自己對事物看法的執著。每次在那些課程中，學習《般若波羅蜜多心經》時，當我要說些什麼的時候，我都是從一個執著的心這樣角度說話，這結果是痛苦的。每次我都會想說些什麼，我都會從這個上座部的核心觀點來說話。這就像是，「哦，知達，那你為什麼還要開口？」

所以我試著去記住「在巴利文藏經中不是說——沒有什麼是值得堅持的吧？」並且知道這是佛陀教義的基本部分，我可以放下一點。但是隨後，我又會再次抓住一些其他的見解，一些上座部所謂正見的某些觀點或某些想法。以這種方式執著……感覺很不好。我的意思是，我在受苦。我讓自己受苦。

有一段時間，我每天在早晨靜坐時都會吟誦這段經文。我只是給自己上鏈條。所以呢，我基本上必須得到一些看法：「好吧，知達，忘掉經的正文，就去唸經的咒語吧！你能用咒語作為心咒，般若波羅蜜多咒，『揭諦揭諦，波羅揭諦，波羅僧揭諦，菩提薩婆訶。』（基本上它的意思是『去吧去吧，去到彼岸，徹底到彼岸，到覺悟。歡呼！』）是的，我想要那個。去吧！沒有執著！沒有執著！沒有執著！覺醒！是的，我可以說了一遍又一遍。」

所以我每次都把它當作我的善巧方便，「知達！當你想在課堂上說些關於這是錯誤的見解，而說佛陀沒有這個教義，或者像這樣諸如此類的蠢事時，你就去唸唸那個咒語。」慶幸的是，我從來沒有說過任何低級的話。我選擇了念誦咒語，過了一段時間，這種執著確實變少了。

但執著這仍然存在，當我在本學期內學習更多的大乘經典時，我不時看到它的迸出。但隨著我讀的經書愈來愈多，譬如《六祖壇經》，我是真的很喜歡它。真的很喜愛它。❀