



Buddhist Recovery Around the World

Vince Cullen - West Berkshire, UK

I was intrigued by the idea of attending a “virtual” Buddhist recovery meeting on-line, so after navigating the user friendly instructions from Vince’s **Fifth Precept Sangha** website, www.5th-precept.org I found myself sitting with a group from the U.K., Ireland and me in America, meditating together and discussing our various backgrounds in Buddhist practice and addiction recovery. Vince was warm and funny, creating an atmosphere of lightness and peace with his meditation instruction and skillfully leading the meeting to create the feeling of a live recovery Sangha. It was an amazing experience, and a wonderful introduction to Buddhist Recovery meetings for those who are curious but may not want to commit to a meeting until they check it out. Even the meditation was a positive experience, after letting go of the technical hurdles that I had to overcome to set it up.



Going back a week or so, I met Vince Cullen on Skype after corresponding with him for over a year over emails and facebook posts. . I had been navigating the web, searching for Buddhist treatment programs and discovered a website for Wat Thamkrabok in Thailand, a unique temple that offers a detox and treatment régime that is controversial and very effective. Vince has a long history with the temple program, having first visited Thailand in November 1998 to see the process and meet with the first abbot of Thamkrabok - Luangpor Chamroon Pamchand . Two years later Vince escorted a crack addict to the temple for detox treatment, then again with a methadone addict in July 2002 . In 2003, Vince ordained, for the first time, as a novice Thamkrabok monk , where he spent most of his time working with other addicts and alcoholics in the temple’s treatment

compound. During this time he was invited by the second Abbot, Luangpor Charoen Pamchand to “use computers to help prepare addicts for treatment at Thamkrabok”. Vince set up the “**Thamkrabok Monastery Independent Information Network**” website www.thamkrabok.net to “inform, prepare and help those people truly seeking an end to their addictions for their journey to Thailand.” At that time, he also established the **TARA Detox Organization** www.tara-detox.org to help addicts access the Thamkrabok treatment program, and over the years has escorted many people seeking recovery to the monastery. He also established the “**Friends of Thamkrabok monastery**” on-line support group to support graduates of the Thamkrabok treatment program.

The “Sajja Vow”

At the heart of the Thamkrabok treatment program is the “**Sajja Vow**”, a commitment to abandon alcohol and other drugs. Rooted in the last of the five Buddhist precepts taken by individuals who wish to lead an ethical and moral life; the fifth precept is the intention to abstain from intoxicants which can cause heedlessness. Taken a step further, the “**Sajja Vow**” holds a tremendous power; it is an act that recognizes the power of stating “these words of Truth” i.e. your intention to completely abstain from intoxicants, stated in front of your recovery community, or the Monks at the Thamkrabok temple, or your sponsor; or even by yourself in a private ceremony with just the Natural Elements as your witness. The subsequent support of your Buddhist practice of the Noble Eightfold path and keeping company with your peers in Buddhist recovery has proven to be a viable path of recovery from addictive behaviors for a growing number of people across the world.

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