

And the battles themselves were regarded more as games of tactics – the hundreds or thousands of soldiers killed merely pawns in a game of chess. Somchai witnessed this and faithfully reported all he had seen and heard to the prince. The prince said nothing.



Next the prince sent him to the forests of the interior. Here the rich timber merchants from the city were forcing local people off their land in order to fell and market the valuable teak trees, which they hauled out by elephant and floated down-river in great rafts. The people brought their grievances to Somchai. ‘The forest is our livelihood,’ they explained. ‘We hunt game and gather wood for our cooking fires and to build our houses. We find many traditional medicines in the forest and the wild honey we collect is a wonderful tonic for young and old. Also the forest prevents floods for it acts as a great sponge during the rainy season and later feeds the streams we need to irrigate our rice-fields.’

And Somchai brought this news back to the prince.



Then the prince sent Somchai to the Far East where a mighty river flowed a thousand miles along the frontier. A great brown river as broad as a small sea that had its source in the snow-capped passes of distant lands to the north and emptied through the wide lush estuaries of distant lands to the south. This river passed through a dozen countries and was a vital route for trade. The prince wanted the other rulers to agree on how best this great waterway should be managed for the benefit of all. But Somchai could only report that each ruler was only interested in the benefits to his own territory, and the taxes and dues he could impose on the trade passing through.

Finally the prince sent Somchai to the far north where the terrible barbarians were always threatening the security of the nation. Just mention of ‘barbarians’ sent dread into the hearts of everyone – young and old alike. Mothers threatened naughty children with the image of barbarians, teachers did the same to disobedient pupils. Any rumours of the coming of the barbarians sent the citizens flocking in hasty clamour seeking the wise counsel of the prince.

But when Somchai arrived he discovered there were no barbarians. ‘Shh,’ a frontier guard whispered on condition of anonymity, ‘there are no longer any barbarians here – perhaps there never were. Only it is a secret that must not be told, for what would we do without the threat of the barbarians?’

Somchai reported all this to the prince and he saw how the news saddened him. Finally he plucked up the courage to address him. ‘Sir, you are a great ruler. All the people respect you and obey your commands, not just here but in other nations. All you have to do is to give the necessary orders and put a stop to all this suffering and violence and intrigue.’ But the prince reproved him. ‘I believe you appreciate the sorrow in my heart when I learn of abuses to my people. But how would it be if I sided with the soldier against his superior, or the farmer against the merchant, or the other way around? I would be accused and abused by one side or the other and in the end nothing would change. I am a symbol only. My power is symbolic. When people come into my presence they bow and kneel but if one day someone stood up and challenged ‘Why?’ then all the symbolism could vanish like mist, together with the respect and authority. I ride a white elephant – only I am entitled to do so but if one day I strolled through the city, drinking in taverns, laughing and joking with the people, they would no longer think of me as Ruler.’ The prince smiled at Somchai, ‘Now I release you from your duties with great thanks and the reward of knowing you have served me faithfully.’

As Somchai left the palace he reflected on his position. He was wealthy. He had married the daughter of a rich and powerful noble and had two delightful children on whom he doted. What else should he now do but devote himself to the well-being of his family, and loyalty to his prince?



News came from the temple that his mentor, the elderly monk was dying. Somchai hurried to see him. The old man pressed his hand. He lay looking up at the ceiling of the same small room Somchai had shared as a temple boy all those years before. Despite his wizened appearance the monk’s expression was sublime. ‘I have arrived at my beginning,’ he murmured

peacefully. ‘I have spent my life re-tracing, re-discovering. It has been a grand journey. Now my soul prepares for its liberation from the confines and limitations of being to the freedom of unbeing. This is a time to rejoice for once more it will be re-

united with the Spirit of unbeing. Who knows where, when or whom it will be reborn?' He gazed long and carefully at Somchai. 'Pray for my soul. More things are gained by prayer than this world dreams of. But I am worried for you. Although you have everything life can give – is it enough? One day you will learn how fragile are the strands that bind us to life. Not those seemingly massive moorings of friends, family, possessions – but threads as insubstantial as a faint breeze, night water rippling on a lake shore, morning mist rising over wooded hills.' He lifted his hand slightly, 'A finger tip just moving.' The dying monk paused as if to gain a final strength. 'Once years ago, you set out on a journey but you turned back. I often wondered what you might have found had you continued.' And then, still smiling affectionately at Somchai the life force passed out of him.

In great sadness Somchai walked outside the city and sitting alone on the river bank he gazed up at the night sky, sparkling with stars.



While he was sitting there Somchai became aware of someone nearby. He could not make out who it was. 'Do I know you?' he inquired.

'But I know you,' came the reply.

'Who are you?' Somchai asked, his thoughts still revolving on his memories of the old priest.

'I am nobody,' came the reply – which surprised Somchai as it seemed to recall a faint memory.

'Where are you from?' he asked. 'Nowhere,' the voice announced. And again a familiar chord echoed in Somchai's mind. 'So what are you doing here?' he said. 'I am just passing through,' the voice answered offhandedly, 'Much the same as you.' This startled Somchai, 'But I live here, I ...' 'Yes, I know all that. But if you look into your heart, you know you are just passing through. Life is like that. It is folly to pretend otherwise.' 'You speak like a wise old man,' Somchai remarked peering into the gloom, 'But your voice is young.' The voice laughed, 'I am certainly not wise. Nor do I wish to be. Perhaps I am young – I don't bother with anniversaries.' 'I wish I could see you,' said Somchai, straining his eyes. 'Perhaps you can,' came the reply. 'Imagine me, that's better. Appearances hardly matter – I'm sure you agree. If you saw me in rags, covered in sores, my hair matted – you would be upset.' This

apparition certainly startled Somchai – though he didn't believe it. 'Listen,' commanded the voice. Somchai listened. He could hear the constant calling of frogs, nothing else. 'What to?' 'Nothing,' came the disconcerting reply. 'But how can I listen to nothing?' he said, and yet now he remembered how many years before on his journey up-country, he might have made the same reply.

'What was the first cry at the first dawn?' suggested the voice. 'What was the first sound in the absolute silence? What was the first silence in the absolute stillness?' Somchai sat there on the riverbank, enchanted by the flow of ideas. He listened eagerly as the poet – for Somchai decided he had to be one, continued. 'Everything has to start somewhere. Everything has to come out of something and something has to come out of nothing or else everything is kept waiting in suspension, in suspense for ever. No thing is waiting no where.'

'You forget time,' Somchai suggested.

'Time progresses, ebbs, flows, moves in a circle, in a silence. But what started it moving? – or is the movement endless with or without start or finish until interrupted? A bird keeps flying so long as its wings don't stop. Shoot it. Bird falls. Time stalls.'

'Stop, stop!' cried Somchai, laughing in delight. 'I can't keep up with all your ideas.'

'Across the evening sea,' continued the voice poetically, 'glides a sail, busy seagulls swoop down the sky, a roar rises from the waterfall hidden in the forest. A sudden cry declares birth lost among life. Shoals of tiny fish flee before their pursuer. Is it pursuit that forces stillness into motion? Who thrusts time into gear? Who chases nothing into everything? But what is behind pursuit – decision or indecision? Is that how we are begotten from the unbegotten, made from the unmade – because of doubt? What was there before the beginning? In the uttermost, outermost stillness, in the absolute silence of unbeing? Was it compassion or contempt? What force prompted unbeing into being? Did something tremble in the heart of stillness and out of the subsequent confusion comes creation? After peace comes war – ' the voice continued, 'but what is before? What constant was always there but hidden – or was it just intuition?' The voice stopped.

'You should tell this to the City,' said Somchai reeling under the onslaught of ideas. 'Perhaps I am the City,' answered the poet. 'Perhaps you should speak to the Prince.' Then the thought came to Somchai, perhaps he is the Prince! 'Will I meet you again?' asked Somchai. Instead of replying directly the poet said, 'When you are sick you ask your body what is wrong. Does it tell you – for it must know? Deep down it must know. Deep down the unbeing in each of us must know how it was born – whispers of our past that may grow in us as we develop.' He paused. 'For many, belief in some supreme being offers access and prospect of some pictorial paradise – but the Spirit of Unbeing manifest in people who guide us by their vision or inspire us in their deeds, pervades all 'being', - forest, meadow, stream, city street, slum – and grants a broader and more infinite succour and solace than the narrow confines of any one rite or ritual.' The voice was fainter and Somchai had to strain to hear it. 'But the concept of Unbeing seems so negative to many that they reject it, and busy themselves in material matters, familiar faiths, traditional trusts, while ...' the voice faded. 'But –' hesitated Somchai, 'how can one follow a path into the unknown?' Yet even as he

spoke he knew the answer. The voice had been silent for some while before Somchai realised it had slipped silently away. He rubbed his eyes in bewilderment. Was he imagining things? – perhaps there was no-one and he was only talking to himself. He stretched stiffly. And yet it was almost as if his younger, long-forgotten self had been speaking to the present one. As if, when years before he had been travelling and had turned back – unbeknown to him a part of him had kept on going. Somchai the merchant had grown rich and powerful, but Somchai the pilgrim had learned so much more – had gained such a greater insight.

Somchai walked slowly and thoughtfully back to his mansion on the edge of the City; to familiar sights, scents, sounds. He was not dissatisfied. His family life delighted him and he had no wish to abandon it, but he was puzzled too. Later as he sat playing with his children and listened to his attractive wife animatedly discussing the latest gossip, a part of him was elsewhere, outside or perhaps deep inside – but apart. It was not as if there was a conflict of interest – not yet, at least. It was rather how best to combine the life of the family and business with these other, older aspirations.



The predicament compounded when a few days later the prince asked him to become Chief Magistrate of the City. Despite deep misgivings Somchai's sense of duty obliged him to accept but his conscience presented him with a dilemma that influenced his judgements. For Somchai frequently felt it was he, and not the accused, who was on trial. The concept of Good and Bad, right and wrong no longer seemed straightforward. The courts were only concerned with 'facts' – but it was what lay behind the facts that interested Somchai. Not merely the circumstances but the circumstantial, not just the substantial but the insubstantial. Nor was it possible to hide under façades such as 'extenuating circumstances', 'balance of mind disturbed', 'crime of passion', The very nature of TRUTH rose before him like a haunting and beckoning spectre, and demanded answers. For Somchai soon realised there was not just one truth but many and each opposing truth equally valid for whoever believed it. Often as magistrate he had to uphold one truth while denying another. There were many occasions when he privately pronounced 'Guilty' on himself just as he publicly declared 'Guilty' on the accused. Is the law there for a man as for a woman? Reason says so, but instinct may object. If a poor man steals from the rich to save his starving family, is it the same as rich merchants stealing – by duplicity – from ignorant farmers? Instinct says no, but reason may object.

In desperation, Somchai sought the prince's counsel. 'Oh, Prince,' he pleaded, 'I have neither the wisdom or the prejudice to judge anyone about anything.' The prince

smiled. 'Don't give up. There is one truth but it is elusive – always just out of reach. We must strive for it, but in the meantime,' he suggested, 'Never condemn human failing. There are ugly words such as corruption – but corruption is a word fit only for worms and corpses. Surely it is only human nature to seek favours and reward them with gifts.'

Somchai was present, together with all the other officials at the Ceremony of the prince's birthday when he received petitions from the people. The prince's declaration to the public astonished Somchai, for the prince announced, 'When I was in prison you visited me, when I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was naked you clothed me. I was a stranger at your gate and you took me in'

Then the people answered – 'but when did we see you a stranger, or hungry or in prison or in need of clothes or food?'

The prince replied, 'Just as you treat the very least of my citizens – so you treat me.'

Somchai appreciated the wisdom of the prince's message but it only made his decisions and judgements the more difficult.

So Somchai continued to deal with corrupt officials who were not really corrupt – merely granting favours – for favours in return, law breakers who were not really breakers, but benders – bending laws a little here and there to suit the convenience of varying situations, with violence which was generally self-inflicted as the bribed witnesses all agreed, with theft which never amounted to more than borrowing without remembering to ask first.

What troubled Somchai most was that he found himself able to believe anything and anyone. Why was he so completely gullible? To ease his conscience he repaid victims of his own injustice from his own wealth.

Finally, in desperation he tendered his resignation to the prince – who refused to accept it, instead promoting Somchai to act as his first minister while the prince went for his annual visit to the northern capital.

Before his departure the prince granted Somchai a final audience. He regarded Somchai kindly. 'Deceit will always betray itself in the end,' he told him. 'However beguiling deceit may behave in the end it will make a slip that will reveal itself for what it is.' He continued, 'A wise king was once faced with two women claiming to be mothers of the same child. He ordered the baby cut into two halves. One of the women agreed, but the other begged the king to save the child's life by giving up her claim. Thus the king knew where the deceit lay.'



Shortly after the prince departed, a prophet arrived in the city. He came to Somchai's attention as a trouble-maker inciting unrest in the City, but Somchai had already heard many rumours about this man and was as eager as anyone to meet him. He had already acquired a considerable following. Some claimed he was a prophet, others said he was a fanatic, and certainly his wild appearance and the strange hypnotic look in his eyes countenanced this. He had by all accounts been wandering around the

remoter parts of the Kingdom for many years dwelling alone in desert places no one else would inhabit and living off the land as best he could, fasting for long periods and going into trances in which he heard 'voices' that declared he should challenge the people to renounce their ways and live a frugal and sacred life. There were many witnesses to his ability to heal people just by touch or a look, or by announcing their sins were forgiven. He arrived in the city mounted on a water-buffalo and thousands poured into the streets to greet him, hailing him as a saviour of the nation.

But the reason he was brought before the city magistrates was the accusations that he was responsible for a wave of wanton destruction. Apparently, on entering the temple he had smashed money boxes and thrown down sacred statues, declaring the place to be unholy and a den of thieves. The temple guards finally fought back a mob of looters and arrested him, bringing him before Somchai who regarded him with deep misgivings and wished someone else could have been his judge.

'What name are you called by?' The man gave no reply. 'What religion are you?' Somchai tried. 'All religions and none,' declared the prophet in a stern loud voice, that reached the crowd gathered outside. He continued, 'True religion is born out of dust and flies, out of suffering and hardship – not from gilded images and fancy ceremonials. True religion comes from the heart, not the pocket of every man.'

Meanwhile, the crowd of supporters outside starting chanting, 'Release him, release him! Cleanse the City! Destroy the images! Repent! Repent!'

When the cries subsided Somchai asked him, 'And what is true religion?' But instead the prophet challenged him further. 'What are your Gods? – Hope, Faith, Compassion – you give this as balm to appease the sufferers. You preach forgiveness. I say revenge. You teach open-mindedness. I say shield your eyes from temptation and gaze steadfastly to the narrow path of repentance.' He turned to face the packed courthouse. 'Purge yourselves of idleness and opulence and idolatry.' His voice rose in a great commanding cry. 'Purge yourselves. Tear down the model on which this city and this state is founded. Destroy every last trace of it – just as you would burn a field to destroy the pests, so that the next season's planting comes up pure!' He pointed an accusing finger at Somchai, 'And you are one of these pests. What right have you to pronounce judgement on others? Who pronounces judgement on you,

protected by privilege and wealth? They say you are a free-thinker.’ He turned to the public. ‘That is a luxury we can no longer tolerate.’ He uttered a loud mocking cry that others echoed as he turned again to face Somchai. ‘I say – banish you and your laws and let the will of the people prevail.’

‘Will or prejudice?’ retorted Somchai defiantly. ‘I doubt you’d let any other opinion prevail except your own.’

But the prophet shouted him down with his booming voice. ‘Deep within us our sacred conscience dictates right and wrong.’ ‘Conscience or reason,’ challenged Somchai, ‘Instinct is our best guide – you manipulate the conscious will of the people with your firebrand rhetoric.’

‘Go,’ roared the prophet. ‘For within three days I will destroy this city. I will tear down the monuments of impiety and level it to the plain it once was. We will drive out all the unholy. Then out of the ground will grow a pure and a just and a holy city.’

Somchai looked about him helplessly – but the very same guards who had brought the prophet before him seemed uncertain which side they should be on. ‘Release him,’ roared the public. ‘Destroy this court’ roared the prophet, and suddenly everyone jumped up and started tearing the place to pieces. Somchai under a barrage of insults and flying objects made a hasty escape out of the back of the building.

He tried to return home but the city was in uproar, - a mad frenzy had possessed the usually calm and civil populace. Fires were blazing out of control everywhere as the frenzied followers of the prophet laid waste and torched what they would.

Somchai wrapped a scarf around his face to shield the pungent, choking smoke. As he pushed his way among the maddened mob he was astonished to see they were even trying to set fire to the Royal Palace. By side routes and alleyways he had not used in years Somchai finally reached the gates of his own house. Although he might have anticipated the servants running off to join the riots – he never expected the hostile reception he received from his own wife and children. His wife had already discarded her fine clothes and covered her head in a plain shawl. His children ignored Somchai’s pleas and ran away. ‘You are not a fit father to us,’ they declared, ‘ You failed to teach us the true faith, the true law.’

Somchai stood outside the gate of the house he was now barred from entering:- exhausted, distressed, bewildered. ‘Why have you turned against me? I love you!’ he shouted – but it seemed to boomerang back like a hollow echo. ‘Love!’ spat one of his children. ‘We scorn your love. We declare our allegiance only to the true prophet. You are corrupt. You would have corrupted us if the prophet had not arrived to save us. Go! You are no longer our father.’

Somchai felt completely helpless and defeated. He backed away and turning, started to run, not knowing where – just to escape from this nightmare.



‘I must get a message to the prince,’ he decided. ‘He will stop this madness.’ Only how could he do it? He needed a place of refuge – but where? On the edge of the square beside the river where the oarsmen waited to take passengers up or down river in their sampans – stood a tall isolated tower. Newly built and still unfinished its purpose remained unclear – but now as Somchai hurried desperately through the city its very isolation beckoned. The base of the tower was half-buried amid heaps of bricks, stone, sand and scaffold. Somchai pushed his way in and battened down the

massive door behind him, before climbing slowly up the many flights of steps to the tower top. From this vantagepoint he commanded a magnificent view over the city to the surrounding country.

Somchai searched this way and that, hoping against hope he might see some way out of his desperate situation. But even as he cast his gaze across the familiar sights he saw a huge crowd assembling behind the solitary figure of the prophet as he strode with single-mindedness towards the river. When the crowd reached the riverbank the prophet faced them with his strident cry of ‘Repent!’ Immerse your bodies in the waters and be cleansed of your sins!’ At first hesitantly and then with increasing enthusiasm the crowd surged into the shallows. ‘You are a holy army of martyrs,’ urged the prophet, ‘But like any army you must obey rules.’ The crowd roared its approval.

‘Now,’ the prophet commanded, ‘Go and rout out anyone who will not join us in this great pilgrimage. Burn all the books you find. Books are deceivers. Wisdom comes from the hearts. Books manipulate our thoughts. Therefore destroy all that is written, all history, all legend and myth, sacred texts, tax records, merchants’ accounts, registers of property, laws – destroy them all!’ And from his viewpoint Somchai watched as the newly washed crowd scattered in every direction. Within minutes he witnessed the first scavengers emerging from ransacked houses carrying heaps of books and texts and armfuls of documents. ‘Burn them all!’ screamed the prophet.

As the day proceeded Somchai witnessed the street fires blazing in all directions. Books are not so easy to burn but the prophet soon added new declarations, ‘All ornaments, all pictures, all images – everything of man-made indulgence – find it and destroy it,’ he cried. And the obedient crowd sped off in a fresh orgy of destruction and looting.

Somchai meanwhile had discovered a great scroll that had been intended to be unfurled at the grand opening on the prince’s return. The banner was quite blank but nearby lay pots of paint and brushes ready for the official inscription. Somchai with an eagerness that was akin to bravado decided to publish his own objections to the prophet’s commands and release it for everyone to see.



As he wrote in large bold lettering he unrolled the scroll so that his message lowered slowly and majestically outside the tower, lifted slightly by a rising breeze. Somchai felt quite passionately inspired. Her remembered the advice the prince had once given him – but adapted it slightly.

“Compassion, Forgiveness, Humility is the secret of humanity.

“Let them be in my mouth and in my speaking

Let them be in my mind and in my thinking

Let them be in my heart and understanding.”

By this time the scroll had unrolled half way down the side of the tower and as the faces of the crowd turned to look at it, they could also see Somchai busily writing away – at the top of the tower.

Their yells brought him to the attention of the prophet standing far below. ‘Traitor!’ he screamed. ‘Splittist.’ The prophet railed, arms upraised in accusation. ‘Regard the enemy within seeking to cause division in your minds. Destroy his traitorous message, tear down the tower, banish the traitor.’



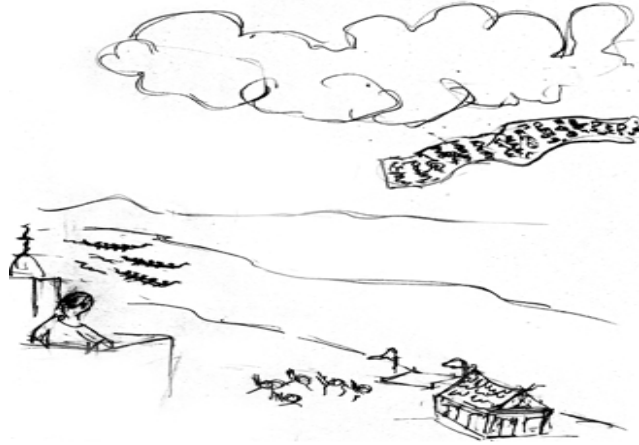
The crowd advanced on the tower and using the picks and crowbars left there by the workmen they started to demolish its foundations. Although the tower was only a few metres square the walls were massively constructed and would long withstand any battering before it toppled. Meanwhile high above the square Somchai went on writing.

“Beyond everything is the sacred Mystery of No thing.”

“The heart of stillness lies within the heart of mankind.”

As he wrote he could feel the shocks and jolts vibrate up the tower from the attack below. He was so engrossed he scarcely noticed it, nor the wind as it rose in force, swirling the ashes of the burnt books and ornaments and lifting Somchai’s scroll so that from the dust-filled square below it seemed to span the sky like a massive sail.

The wind rose into a howling gale, scattering the debris into twisting plumes of ash and dirt. People clutched at one another for support and the screams and taunts of the prophet were flung away unheard as soon as they were spoken. High in his tower Somchai wrestling with the thrashing folds of the scroll went on writing his message to the world at large.



Over the plains the sky blackened and dark tentacles of tornados twisted ominously onto the earth below. Rain lashed down as if in an unrestrained fury. The crowd cowered, seeking shelter as best they could. Soon only two people remained defiant. High above the tower torn from his grasp by the wind the scroll flew away like the tail of a great kite and vanished among the storm clouds across the river. Far below even the prophet was finally silenced – exhausted he still stood defiant – his raised fist clenched in a menacing gesture. But Somchai, shielding his eyes as he tried to follow the flight of his scroll, saw instead a bright gleam of light shine under the darkened sky and as the glow rose to illuminate the river he could see a line of boats. Straining to see more clearly he could make out a procession of royal barges – paddled by a hundred of the royal retainers in their costumes of red and gold. It could mean only one thing and Somchai clutching at the tower wall for support with one hand and gesturing wildly with the other yelled with all his strength, ‘The Prince, the Prince!’

At first no one else noticed – but as the storm started to subdue, and light streamed in again from all directions, others too on prominent places saw the flotilla and took up the cry.

Soon everyone, as if released, was rushing to the waterside and Somchai high on his tower and the prophet still as a statue in the square below were alone and ignored.



Thus the prince returned to his city. From somewhere a white elephant was produced which the prince mounted – pavilioned in splendour. Did he for a moment gaze up at Somchai pinioned to his tower, or at the prophet turned as if to stone in the square? If so the glance was scarcely visible. Slowly the prince proceeded through the smouldering city and everywhere the crowds parted, cheering before him, united in one cry, ‘The Prince, the Prince.’

Then slowly Somchai descended from the tower, unbarred the massive iron door and stood face to face with the prophet in the deserted square.

After the prince moved back into the hastily repaired Royal Palace, he issued two decrees – banishing the prophet and Somchai to opposite corners of the Kingdom. He sent the prophet to a remote mountain crag, accessible only to the hardest adventurer – where his followers, if they were not too exhausted by the steep and tortuous climb were welcome to visit him as and when they wished. And Somchai he sent back to the rice-fields of his youth. What passed between the Prince and the prophet Somchai never heard, but to him the prince was most sympathetic.

‘An emperor long ago built a city he declared was a model of heaven on earth. But if we had such a chance what model of heaven would we choose? For you it is no thing and no where. So how would such a city function? For the prophet there are strict codes covering every aspect of daily life leaving no scope for individual imagination and little individual liberty. The two of you represent two extremes. Somchai – if we followed your uncertainty and indecision and gave total liberty for every individual to decide for themselves what was right and wrong, complete chaos would result. And if we copied the narrow-minded extremes of the prophet, we would become a mean, hard, vengeful society, intent on spreading our doctrine like a wall of flame to consume one and all.’

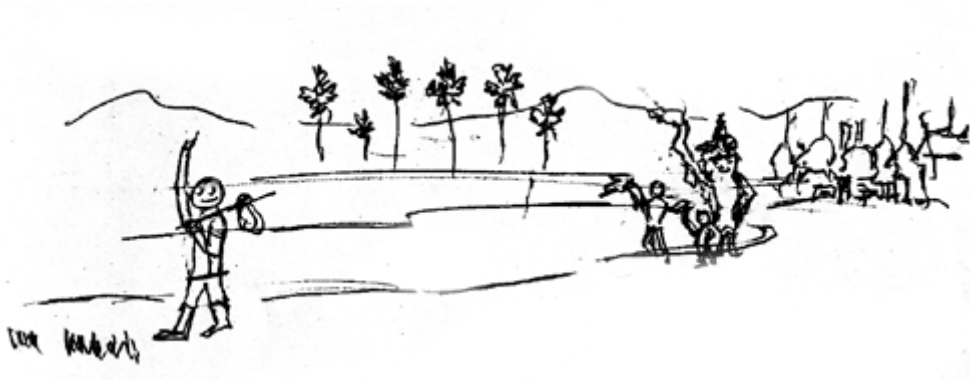
‘So, what is the answer?’ inquired Somchai.

‘Moderation,’ the prince replied. ‘There is a middle way. It may not be ideal and it may sound like compromise – but compromise is better than confrontation. Heaven,’ the prince concluded, ‘has no replica and is surely as diverse in its judgements as it is

in its creation.’ He smiled kindly at Somchai. ‘My role is to try and secure an environment for the safety and harmony of every citizen. Of course there will be abuses. But if we listen to our hearts there is always a desire for reconciliation. Somchai, my friend, your political message of abstraction fails to give people the security they need. For them abstraction is a distraction or a delusion – but not a solution. But we need idealists – both you and the prophet – to spur us on. Therefore I grant you both the freedom to think and say whatever you wish to whoever you wish, to create your own models of society – the prophet on his high crag from where with his keen insight he can survey the horizons of the known world and you, Somchai, in the middle of nowhere – which is where you want to be anyway – in the self-same hut where you once lived so simply and happily, in the rice-fields.’

So Somchai bowed and left the city – even as it was being cleaned and rebuilt – just as he had walked out of it all those years before.

As he passed by his house on the highway following the river, his children ran out after him and his wife waved him an affectionate ‘farewell’. Although Somchai felt saddened at leaving everything – he also felt a sense of hope and anticipation for his journey ahead. For this time he would not turn back and by leaving everything he would discover the reality and fulfilment of no thing – just as the poet within had promised.



THE END