



FOREST SANGHA

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Reflecting on kindness

Talk by Ajahn Candasirī
given at Amaravati on 15th August 2000

One of the things that most interests me is a sense of well-being. So I thought this evening to reflect on a chant that we do very frequently in the community. The Pāli is *Ahaṃ sukhito homi, niddukkho homi, avero homi, abyāpajho homi, anīgho homi, sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi* – ‘May I abide in well-being, in freedom from affliction, in freedom from hostility, in freedom from ill-will, in freedom from anxiety, and may I maintain well-being in myself.’

The translation that’s given for the word, *sukhito*, is ‘happy’ or ‘blessed’ – a sense of blessedness, or being blessed. This is something we can consider. We might see it as being something to do with angels and saints and special people. But we can also consider, in what sense are we blessed? Is it something that we can actually bring about, just through the way that we live our lives at the most ordinary level of human existence?

For example, the practice of generosity, which may involve something as simple as having time for each other, really listening to one another. I don’t like talking to people when I feel that they haven’t got time for me. I’d rather not bother. But, on the other hand, there is an extraordinary feeling that comes when I sense that somebody is able to take time to give full attention to me. It might just be a

couple of minutes, but the sense that the person is actually right there and able to be with me – I find that incredibly nourishing when people can do this. And I realise perhaps that when I can do it for other people, that’s something they find nourishing.

I think we can solve a lot of problems for each other just by being able to do this – that it can bring about a kind of healing. This is a form of generosity, one that we can easily underestimate the value of.

We can also reflect on the goodness, or virtue, of our lives. This is another source of blessing –

...it’s about creating the causes for a sense of blessing to arise, and then really allowing ourselves to enjoy that sense of blessing, that sense of well-being.

śīla: the way that we hold the precepts that we have, how we use and apply them in our lives. This is another thing that can bring a feeling of well-being. We can

take care to avoid harming anything, even a mosquito or a slug or a spider that we might not like particularly – that we are frightened of, or find repulsive. It too wants to live, it too wants to be well. Gradually, what arises when we live carefully and responsibly in this way is a sense of gladness, which is perhaps what we mean by this feeling of being blessed. It’s a feeling of gladness and rejoicing in the presence of other beings – in their welfare and happiness. So even very very simple beginnings in generosity, kindness, upholding a

precept structure are a foundation for a sense of blessing that we can enjoy in our lives.

We're not very used to enjoying these kinds of things, because usually we think about our unworthiness – our faults and our failures – rather than our worthiness. It's almost as if there's a fear that we might get complacent or swollen-headed if we start thinking about how good we are! But I think that if we don't do this, we're missing out on something very important and precious in our lives. It's very important to enjoy life.

We tend to think of enjoyment as being selfish or indulgent or unskilful – but what I'm talking about is the skilful enjoyment of life. So when we chant, 'May I abide in well-being' – *aham sukrito homi* – 'may I have an experience of blessing and happiness in my life' – it's not just wishful thinking. It's about creating the causes for a sense of blessing to arise, and then really allowing ourselves to enjoy that sense of blessing, that sense of well-being. It's quite legitimate to enjoy the blessings of virtue and generosity!

When we go on our alms-round, I sometimes think, 'What on earth am I doing?... This is crazy, going along and depending on people to get my meal today.' But then behind that, there's the thought: 'I'm giving people an opportunity to do something that's going to make them happy: to practise generosity, putting something into my alms-bowl that will not only nourish me but will also nourish their own hearts.' As any of you who've participated in this will know, we stand in a place where people can ignore us and pass by – and most people do. But with the ones that actually do come up and offer something there's always a feeling of happiness, almost a sense of fun doing something a little out of the ordinary. Even when I did this in India and had beggars putting food in my bowl, it was quite amazing to see the happiness that it brought them, sharing out the little biscuits or bread that they had.

So next we have: *niddukkho homi* – 'May I abide in freedom from affliction, in freedom from suffering'. We can tend to think that this means: 'Can I please avoid suffering. I don't want suffering, I don't like suffering – may I live free from suffering, not having suffering.' And it would be very nice, wouldn't it, if we could live free from suffering, without suffering. But actually it requires quite a lot of wise reflection to live free from suffering – and there are certain sufferings that we can't avoid. We can't avoid the sufferings of old age, sickness, death, the death of those that we love. Then there's bodily discomfort and pain. However, there is also a suffering that we can avoid; but it takes practice. It takes wise reflection, it takes effort and understanding.

There is the suffering that is because of wanting things to be other than the way they are. We can suffer because of wanting to have a position, to be somebody

in relation to somebody else; wanting to have our own way; wanting people to agree with us; wanting people to like us; wanting to succeed, not wanting to fail; not wanting to be disappointed or hurt... The list is endless isn't it? But the cure is very simple, once we get the hang of it – learning how to let go of desire.

It's a life-time's practice, it doesn't just happen. But we can learn how to see things in accordance with Dhamma, rather than in accordance with our ideas, our conditioning; with our wishes, our hopes and longings. We can learn how to see things in accordance with reality, so that we don't pin our hopes, our aspiration, on things that can never satisfy, can never heal us or bring us a lasting sense of happiness and peace. So – *niddukkho homi* – 'freedom from affliction' – it's something that is attainable, but it does, like everything else, require effort, require reflection and understanding.

Then how do we let go of hostility and ill-will?... *Avero homi, abyāpajjho homi*: ill-will, malevolence, vengefulness, resentment, bitterness – all of these things that cause us misery? Often we don't even see that they're causing us suffering. People can spend hours feeling resentful about being slighted or ignored or hurt by somebody else. Sometimes it can go on even longer – days, weeks, months, years! Sometimes, our grumbling can bring a kind of gratification, a feeling of righteousness – of being right, and someone else or the situation being wrong – but is that really happiness? Is that really well-being? When I look into my own heart, I see that, 'No, it's not. It's not really what I want. It's not really how I want to live my life.'

This is very important. Sometimes we're not even aware of our mental habits. Particularly, I've found, I can be quite unaware of how I relate to myself – the sense of criticism, judgement, ill-will that I can bear towards this being here. I've noticed that there is a tendency to judge and undermine myself when I make a mistake. It's like having a rather mean parrot sitting on my shoulder, whispering: 'You're no good. You could have done that better. Why did you do that?... Why did you say that?... She's much better than you; you should be like her – but you couldn't be, you're hopeless...' Probably each of you has a slightly different voice inside – your's might be saying it in German, French, Japanese or Chinese. Whatever language it is, it's still the same message. It still burrows away into any sense of well-being, blessedness, or happiness.

I remember one time at Chithurst I was having a retreat, and I was going through the pattern 'You're no good. You should be able to meditate better. You'll never be any good... all these years you've been practising, and still you can't concentrate. Your mind's all over the place. You're lazy!' – all that stuff. I remember just contemplating this mild misery. It was

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EDITORIAL

Interconnectedness

In the Buddha's presentation of mundane Right View the understanding of 'There is mother and father' is included. Whatever our experience, to be alive now means someone must have provided us with food – actually feeding us when we were small – with warmth, with shelter... And from a whole web what we need to live continues to flow. With our acknowledgement of this comes an appreciation of our interconnectedness: we arise, are formed and conditioned by, and exist within a human context. The experience of this human birth is one of co-dependency and relatedness; both physically and in what we take ourselves as being. When we start to experience this – that we cannot in truth separate ourselves from the world around us – the sense of *anattā*, not-self arises. This is the supermundane path. However, much of the Dhamma-Vinaya is about fulfilling the mundane human aspects of our experience. This is the ground of the Path: practising generosity, the establishment of right relationships, developing kindness, compassion, appreciation of goodness, equanimity. These then mature our hearts for awakening.

Living in one of these monasteries this interconnectedness is highlighted. These are places supporting and supported, by those from the four (at least) directions, and they are situated in the four directions. Anyone who lives in the realm of those inclined to Dhamma practice is living in a global village. This means we can experience ourselves as being related to and affected by a very wide field of people: there can be a great flow of human energy. And one question that comes up is, 'how do I respond to this?' There is a creative tension in finding a responsive balance between taking care of 'others' and taking care of 'ourselves/home.' Since we are so interconnected and do not exist independent of our context, even what these relative terms really mean is quite an inquiry. Always the test of our response has to be, 'Does it lead to skilful or unskilful states, does it support waking-up?'

The Buddha encourages us to appreciate Mother and Father, those who support and guide us when we have

not yet matured enough to do so for ourselves; to recognize our indebtedness. This has a correlation in the Sangha experience with the elders and teachers who foster us. We need to recognise what they have offered us, the teaching, the encouragement, and then for our part we can reciprocate in what ways we can; with our care, with our commitment to waking-up. In connection with this newsletter there is Ajahn Sucitto, there in the beginning with scissors and paste technology, and Ajahn Candasiri, who as you know, has been editing it over later years. Both, recognising the actual geographical distance that separates us and committed to bridging it, have gracefully given a great deal of time and care to this

over so many years. Now, as they both carry much responsibility, it will rest briefly (with the faith that someone to provide what is needed will soon manifest) in these inexperienced hands – a small way of helping these elders and this vast field of relatedness which this newsletter has been a

tangible response to.

In itself the newsletter rests in a field of human support, with so many contributing their time and skill for its production; most notable being Tavarō who typesets it and more. If we examine our lives, aren't they also like this? We are sustained on so many levels. Apart from the elemental support we depend upon – water, air, warmth, food - our lives are sustained by myriad acts of kindness and other people's efforts; just as we help support others in turn. When we stop and investigate it, are we ever completely outside this – where does the food we eat come from or the cloth we wear? Can we be where there is nothing that has not come from someone else? What does it do to our hearts to realise this impossibility? Beyond the fear that might arise at our apparent vulnerability, we can realise the fact that something is supporting us. Often what seems to be needed is the faith to rest back into that which can and is holding us. Resting back into this realm of connectedness, into the breath, into awareness; with the faith that, 'the Dhamma upholds those who uphold it'.

Sister Thānīyā

*...we can not in truth separate ourselves
from the world around us...*

just before the meal-time. I was standing by the back door, feeling mildly miserable, and I began to reflect on one of the qualities of the Buddha: *'bhagavā'*, which means 'blessed one', and I was thinking about what being blessed was: a feeling of fullness, of happiness – and thinking: 'Well, you're not feeling very full and happy, are you?...' I saw that this rather pathetic, miserable, empty feeling was completely the opposite of feeling blessed. I began to see what I was doing to myself. There was no-one else doing it to me – it was something that was coming from my own mind, and I realised it was there quite a lot of the time.

I saw at that point that I had a choice. I could actually choose whether to continue to live with this mild misery, or to consciously generate a sense of well-being, or blessedness, that was free from this negativity. I thought, 'Well, that's not how I relate to other people. If someone comes to me, and tells me that their meditation is no good, or that they don't feel worthy I don't say to them: 'Well, that's true. You're not really very good, are you?...' Usually, I say to them: 'That's all right. Don't worry. You're doing the best you can. Keep on trying. Contemplate the goodness of your life, and realise that actually you're doing very well – look at how most people are living.' I talk to people in positive encouraging ways. I realised that I can do that to myself as well, rather than being so mean and critical and nasty. So we can learn how to relate to ourselves in more loving and positive ways. Rather than waiting for someone else to come along and encourage us. We can do this for ourselves.



We also need to be very careful about the ill-will that we can harbour towards one another – particularly when we're right! Maybe someone *is* making a complete mess of things, and really being quite unskilful in the way that they're living... Well, what's a skilful response to that?

I remember years ago at the time of the Gulf War, Luang Por would listen to the news, and each day, he would tell us about what was happening during this war.

He talked about Saddam Hussein, who was definitely being portrayed as the villain. I noticed in my own heart a tendency to feel a lot of anger, a lot of righteousness, indignation – even quite powerful rage in relation to this human being, who seemed to be causing so much harm to others.

So as I reflected on this, I thought: 'Well, is this vengefulness the most skilful response?' There was a feeling of wanting to punish him in some way for the things he was doing. I wanted to make sure he got what he deserved: 'Well, he deserves something really horrible. It's up to me to make sure he gets it!' It was a very powerful feeling. I've had it in

relation to other people as well – this sense that it's up to me to punish and bring about justice. So, it can happen in extreme ways, quite obvious ways; but it can also happen in quite subtle ways. I've also noticed it in relation to little things that can happen in the monastery – somebody consistently not turning up for the washing up, or not coming to pūjā, or getting things wrong – I can have a similar feeling of indignation.

There's a story that I often tell. Many years ago in Chithurst, when I was an *anagārikā*, I was in the kitchen

making tea one day. It was winter time and the kitchen scene at Chithurst used to be very nice, because it was a place where it was warm – everywhere else was cold and damp. Ajahn Ānando, who was the senior monk at that particular time, came into the kitchen – he'd obviously been having a very difficult time with somebody; he looked at me, sighed, and said: 'Thank goodness I don't have to be concerned with sorting out other people's *kamma!*' I've reflected on that a lot – the feeling of having to sort people out, and make sure they get their just deserts. But actually we don't have to do that, it's not up to us to punish, or blame, or to take revenge – any of that. We don't have to do it, we can let go of that. Such a relief. This law of *kamma*, it takes care of everything. Nobody gets away with anything.

So the good news is that it's not up to us to sort it out. Our duty is to maintain a sense of ease and well-being. Our duty is to free the heart from suffering. Our duty is to realise complete liberation. That's our duty. Our duty isn't to fall into hell over somebody else's misdeed – we don't have to do that. We have a choice. We don't have to stay, to linger in states of resentment, bitterness or cruelty. The Buddha talks about this in the *Dhammapāda*; he says that hatred never ceases by hatred. If you keep thinking about somebody who's abused you, hurt you, robbed you, beaten you up, done whatever it is, had it in for you – you're not going to find happiness by thinking in those ways. This doesn't bring us a sense of happiness and well-being. With mindfulness, we realise we have a choice. We don't have to linger in these states. We can let them go.

But sometimes it's not so easy, is it? These thoughts can really get under the skin and obsess the mind. It's at those times that we need to really bring out our tool-kit – I often see the Buddha's teachings as a tool-kit of techniques for dealing with particular difficulties. There's a very good tool-kit for obsessive unskilful thoughts of one kind or another. But of course we have to recognise them as being unskilful, don't we? And that, in itself, is a very important first step.

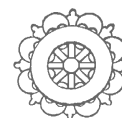
Sometimes people become quite overwhelmed when they start to recognise these things. They think, 'Oh, I thought I was such a nice person before I started to meditate, and now I see all these mean nasty thoughts and unskilful habits. But you can't begin to cure the disease until you recognise that you have it. So when people come to me with these kind of tales: 'I didn't realise how awful I was,' I say, 'Well that's a great blessing to realise how awful you are! Now you can begin to do something about it. It's a great great blessing that at last these things are beginning to come out into the light – the dust, the cobwebs, the nasty smelly bits.' So the first step is to recognise it, without tumbling into further aversion and despair and misery; to see it in a positive way: 'Ah, OK – now let's see what we can do about it.'

Firstly, it's important to see that we don't have to

think these thoughts. We don't have to carry these things around. We can set them to one side. That's one skilful means: to realise that we have a choice.

When the thought arises, we can put our attention somewhere else. Sometimes people say, 'Well, isn't that repressing?' – but is it? We've recognised it, we've acknowledged it, we've seen the harmfulness of it. Now it's time to allow it to cease, to let it go – turning our attention to the silence, or to the body. Let go of all our thoughts, all our concerns – just feel the contact with the floor to really *feel* the breath, the body breathing... These are things we can do, aren't they? And even if we can only do it for a moment – before the obsessive, mean, nasty thought comes back again – just that moment is a powerful piece of ammunition in diminishing the power of the obsessive thinking. It puts a real dent into the mean, vengeful storyline that we've got going. So we can just take a moment to enjoy the breath, to feel the body, rather than allowing the obsession to completely occupy, to fill our whole mind space.

Another thing we can do is to notice the space around or between thoughts, or to replace a mean thought with a kind thought, say, by trying to see things from the other person's point of view. We can try to tune into their suffering. Like with Saddam Hussein – I'd think, 'Well, he's a human being. He wants to be happy, but he's certainly going to have to pay a really horrible price for this cruelty he's inflicting on others.' Just seeing that he



Sunday Afternoon Talks at Amaravati

Sunday afternoon Dhamma talks this year,
as follows:

22nd July – **The World and the End of the World**

29th July – **Ignorance as the Cause of Suffering**

5th August – **True Happiness**

12th August – **Social Thought, Speech and Action**

(Ajahn Candāsiri)

19th August – **Love and Compassion**

26th August – **Tathatā - the Way it is**

Ajahn Sumedho will offer the talk unless otherwise specified.

All talks begin at 2.00pm

and are followed by tea and discussion

All are welcome

doesn't want to suffer – and he's going to suffer; that brings a sense of compassion straight away into the heart. It's not condoning the cruelty, the unskilfulness of somebody's life; but rather, it's replacing our own vengeful, mean, nasty thoughts that are sapping our sense of well-being with something that is more wholesome.

When we chant the sharing of blessings, the goodness of our lives with 'virtuous leaders of the world', people sometimes comment: 'But many leaders of the world don't seem to be particularly virtuous. Many of them seem just to want a lot of power; they do quite awful things.' But I'm interested in helping them to be wiser, in helping them to be happy. I know, myself, that if I'm not happy, I'm not very wise, I'm not very mindful. If there's a feeling of tension or fear, there's not much mindfulness and so I tend to make mistakes, to be mean, narrow-minded, selfish, frightened. Skilfulness comes from a sense of well-being. When people are kind to me, when I'm kind to myself, then I'm naturally more kind to others, naturally more in tune with other beings and their needs. So I'm quite happy to share any blessings of my life with dictators and foolish selfish people, because I see they need all the blessings they can get!

Then, *anigho homi* – freedom from anxiety: worry, too, can undermine our sense of well-being. These last couple of days I've had quite good reason to be anxious, as my eighty-six year-old father needed to have an operation under a general anaesthetic. So it was quite

reasonable to feel concerned and anxious about him in hospital. 'He's quite old now – and will he survive the operation?...' These things. But I knew actually that worry wasn't going to help: it certainly wasn't helping me, and I also had a sense that it wasn't really helping him either. I was quite interested in the distinction between concern and worry. Worry seems to me to be quite unwholesome – it's like an obsession: worry, worry, worry! And I noticed that when I wasn't being mindful, the mind very naturally went into worry – imagining the worst possible scenario. Whereas concern was more, 'Well, I am concerned. There's a reason to be concerned, but what's the skilful thing to do in response to this?'

So I decided that whenever the mind was beginning to go into worry – beginning to imagine the worst scenario – that I would use my imagination, the power of the mind, to imagine a different scenario. I phoned my brother yesterday evening, and he told me that my father still hadn't come out of the operating theatre; he'd been there for quite a long time – longer than expected – and my mother was a bit worried. So then, instead of worrying, I deliberately thought: 'Well, it is a very delicate operation. Probably it's just taking a bit longer, and he's actually making a very good recovery. He's doing really well.' And so as I was on my walking path, I just kept thinking: 'He's doing very well, he's getting better' rather than, 'Well, maybe he's died... and they'll be telling my mother...' It was very easy for the mind to go into that, but every time it did, I'd deliberately think: 'Actually he's making a really good recovery, he's doing really well...'

How much of our lives do we spend worrying about things, being anxious about things that haven't happened, and may never happen? Can we really appreciate how much we undermine our sense of well-being through doing this? Can we begin to introduce some kind of skilful means as an antidote to worry and anxiety? So, if your mind goes into constructing worst possible scenarios, imagine a totally amazing and wonderful and best scenario. Doesn't it make us feel better, rather than miserable? I tried it yesterday, and it worked really well. And, in fact, my father is recovering well.

These are some ways we can reflect on well-being: 'May I maintain well-being in myself'. So, it's not just a wishy-washy wish, a nice idea, as we chant these things. These are reflections that have a lot of guts to them, a lot that we can consider in terms of our own practice, in a very moment-by-moment kind of way. It's not saying that we're going to avoid every kind of suffering and difficulty; having been born into this human realm, we have to experience all kinds of things – pain, sickness, disease, sadness – this comes to all of us in due course. What I'm talking about is the needless suffering; learning to recognise that, and to replace it with something brighter and more positive. Then our lives can be a blessing, not just for ourselves but also for each other. ❖

Alms Bowl

Every true teacher is like this:
simple, open, a sign of blessings,
knowing the nature of what I can hold.

This is your bowl, until it is broken:

At this wandering shrine
all things shall be an offering
silently received, lovely in shape.

...then walk for alms with quiet heart.

Cool steel, stainless.
The world's hunger runs here
and empties into an ocean.

First fire the bowl to remove its sheen...

I was young: I built that fire
out of wood, cloth, bamboo -
a going forth through natural things.

and regard it as you would the Buddha's skull...

But now its form meets my hands
and spreads their fingers, wide as a vow.
Wide enough to receive the streets.

Staying At Home

*Ajahn Amaro, in conversation with Ajahn Sucitto,
comments on recent developments at Abhayagiri.*

AS: *The monastery has been running for four or five years now, and you have also been pretty busy teaching, and this year you felt it would be good to stay in the monastery more; so how has it been?*

AA: It's been very good. Certainly the effect of staying 'in-house' has had a very beneficial effect, both for myself and for the community. There is the quiet but powerful effect of keeping the rhythm of the community life, going up to my *kuti* after the meal time, spending the day there, coming back down for morning and evening chanting day after day; feeling the rhythm of regular monastic routine and then sharing the time with other members of the community. Much more of a genuine sense of community.

AS: *How many people do you have now? Has it been changing, people coming and going?*

AA: The monastic community has changed a little, but it has been around six monks, one nun and one or two *anagārikas* or *sāmaneras* over the past year or so. We have a limit on the number of people that can be here that we have agreed with the local government. The development for the monastery is planned in four phases and each level, each phase, has an agreed limit on the number of people staying here. So that is set at thirteen, including guests, until we finish the first phase. It's both a blessing and a curse. There have been a lot of people who have wanted to come out here and visit or live here, train here, but we have had to say 'sorry, you can't come.' That has been a bit wrenching at times. There were people who wanted to be part of the community, but there was no space to take them on for training – so that was unfortunate. But then the other side of it is that we actually have only had enough people here that the facilities can provide for. So against our better judgement, the limits actually make sense.

AS: *And the lay visitors? A fairly steady interest of people wanting to come and stay for a few days?*

AA: Yes, pretty much all through the year when we don't have our winter retreat on, from the beginning of April through to the New Year, there is a constant trickle. Occasionally there are times when there aren't any lay guests. We are quite far away from the main metropolitan areas – one hundred and twenty miles from San Francisco – so it takes a bit of effort to get up here. But also the other factor is that the monastery is very widely known. America is a big country but it is also a heavily connected country. There are tremendous long-distance communications of one kind or another, so we are very well known about, consequently we get a lot of enquiries from all over the place about people wanting to

come and stay. Right now we have a few other prospective *anagārikas* – one who is from Kansas, one from New Jersey, Philadelphia – who found out about us through seeing our website or reading the newsletter and who have come over for some time. So a trickle of people; but it is a very big parish so that the interest in our community is very strong. Stronger than I had thought, there being very little historical presence of monasticism in the United States.

AS: *California is full of meditation centres, Dhamma centres, retreat centres... You would think there wasn't much left to soak up interest in monasticism, but you have obviously gained support and interest in what you're offering.*

AA: Absolutely, yes. When I first came here I was expecting I would have to deal with a huge range of interests and characters. But actually it is very self-selecting because there is a whole phone book of places where people can go that specifically cater to all the different shades of spiritual interest, from the academic to the New-Agey, to free-wheeling non-hierarchical, feminist – you name it, there is everything. Every shade is there, so that the people we see are the ones who are really interested in meditation, Theravādan monastic-style practice. And who are not put off by the ritual side of things, by the form of the robe, the *Vinaya* and so forth. So that actually we are able to hold to a much more

orthodox and specific style of teaching. So in some ways we find ourselves more conservative than other monasteries – which have to cater for a broader spectrum of interest because they are the only spiritual thing happening for three or four counties around.

AS: *So in terms of teaching Dhamma, what particular things do you home in on?*

AA: Well, it is quite a range really. Certainly renunciation is a big piece, and the Precepts another huge piece that are left out consciously or unconsciously from other people's teachings. The role of the form, the spiritual symbolism of the ritual side – each one of those one could talk about for quite some time.

One of the most prominent features here in California is the rampant materialism, even more so than normal because of the explosion in the information technology industry. Everyone's lives are affected by it and there are huge amounts of money sloshing around. Teachings which go against the materialistic ethic are completely pooh-poohed. Every month I give a talk in the Bay area, in Berkeley, and this year I had noticed large billboards cropping up, particularly on the road between San Francisco and Silicon Valley, which is just to the south

*...the need for spiritual teachings
that counterbalance materialism
is fairly obvious.*

of the city. They say things like ‘Root of all evil, won’t buy you happiness, blah blah blah...’, and then down in the corner ‘E-Trade’, the name of the company that was advertising. Or, ‘High octane capitalism served up daily.’ They come across as saying that everything you ever heard about modesty, about frugality, about money not being able to provide you with happiness is nonsense, you were lied to. There was one I saw, an advertisement, it was a kind of film noir picture, very blue and black which was of the profile of a man, and the man’s face was pressed against the pavement with a boot print across the side of his head and his glasses broken. The caption said, ‘Our regrets to the meek and the earth they will not inherit. In this world of information technology it is kill or be killed.’ And this is an advert!

So the need for spiritual teachings that counterbalance materialism is fairly obvious. So there is also the stress we make on *sila*, which doesn’t really get touched on by many spiritual groups. The power of *sila* to really provide the basis of happiness, the basis of peace and, in a way, a clear understanding of moral sensitivity, of *hiri-ottappa*. And how to not begin thinking when *hiri-ottappa* arises that it is some kind of neurotic problem that you feel bad about. Some harm that you just did, some harm that you just inflicted on another – the fact that you feel bad about it is not a neurotic problem. It is actually good that you feel bad about it. This sense of conscience and regret is what the Buddha referred to as the guardian of the world.

AS: *So the monastery, the fact that one can stay here with no charge must be....*

AA: Radical! Cutting edge.... This is right on the edge. Despite the fact that this has been around for two and a half thousand years, it is very cutting edge. Celibacy, that is also pretty wild. But we are very well supported. It is also very encouraging that this support comes not just as large donations from small numbers of people but from all over the country. You know, again, one of the

advantages of the information technology, is that people do hear about us and do feel connected to us. They are – even if they are living in Maine, Mississippi or Minneapolis. The idea that you can come and stay here and there is no charge – nothing is expected at all, it is not even mentioned or even thought of – is remarkable, and very attractive. And people support that even if they can’t physically get here.

AS: *I notice that you have also been invited to be on the board or part of the teachers’ group at Spirit Rock. So in some way there is a recognition that the monastic has a part to play in the general flow of Dhamma in California. Can you comment on that?*

AA: Yes. I was invited two or three years ago to join the teachers’ council there. Actually probably three or four years ago now. And, at first, I was certainly more on the edge of things. I knew Jack Kornfield and James Baraz quite well but many of the other people I didn’t know at all. So there was a certain tentativeness in my joining the group. I certainly tried to hold back a little bit and not pontificate or project a sense of wanting to be treated specially. What I have found is a deepening friendship and respect. I also began to understand a bit more of how they work and what they are about and where their priorities lie, so it has developed into quite a co-operative relationship.

I was on the board of directors for a couple of years because they felt a ‘lack of ballast’ on the Dhamma level in the administrative body that runs the centre. And so I said I would do it for a couple of years and lend my effort to that. That finished just a week or so ago actually, and so I signed off. My priority is here really with the monastery and trying to be available to help training those who have taken ordination as well as the people who are particularly interested in participating in and supporting this life. It seemed clear it would be wrong to diversify my energy much more, for a longer period of time. I thought ‘I lent my support as I could and now it is time to bow out.’ I am still part of the teachers’ circle and participate in that way. But going to board meetings – I won’t be playing that role any more.

Certainly I think, that trust and friendship having been developed, there is a growing openness to the traditional side of things. In years gone by there was a deliberate pushing away of a lot of the form – shrines and bowing and chanting and ritual and ceremony and so forth. In particular of the hierarchical nature of lay and monastic divisions. But I think that over the years there has been a sense of ‘this isn’t just us.’ You know, there are generations that will come after. Then where you inherited the teachings from becomes more and more apparent. I think in that respect the whole role of lineage and continuity is more and more clear. So more energy has gone into the young people’s programme, the teen programme and the family programme.

Jack himself has quite publicly begun to go against using the word *vipassanā* as a generic term to refer to their community and what they do. In fact it is, and always has been, much broader than just *vipassanā* meditation. It is like ‘zen’ – it refers to a particular aspect of meditation, but it also refers to a whole cultural milieu. So he has started quite consciously using the term ‘The Way of the

Lay Events at Amaravati 2001

The one day and weekend events provide an opportunity to spend time together, in silence and in exploring themes relevant to practice and daily life. Whether you are just starting, or whether you have a well established practice, you are welcome to participate and contribute.

June 2 (Day) The 5 Spiritual Faculties.

June 29 – July 1 (Weekend)

Right Livelihood.

July 28 (Day) The Four Noble Truths.

Sept. 28 – 30* (Weekend) The Creative Arts and Buddhist practice (will include practical explorations of the theme). **

Oct. 27* (Day) The Eightfold Noble Path.

Dec. 1 (Day) A Day of Practice.

for more information please contact:

Nick Carroll, 020 8740 9748 or
Chris Ward, 01442 890034

* Change of date/theme from original announcement.

** For Arts Weekend contact –

Santoshni Perrera 07775 532023
Chris Blain 01207 563305

Elders' rather than *vipassanā* as a way of referring to who they are and what they do. Which is, I think, quite a powerful gesture; a name is an important thing and has a significant effect.

AS: *I heard you have been looking at the possibility of having some of the lay people help out in an associative role with the monastery. I think you called the programme 'ALMS' – Abhayagiri Lay Ministry. Could you say more about what you had in mind?*

AA: Well it is an idea that has been formulating for a little while, fundamentally coming out of the *upāsikā* programme that began it must be nearly ten years ago in England. I was quite involved in helping to pull that together and develop it and, it is a programme that was developed to help provide a more consistent support for lay practitioners. When I came to the States four and a half years ago, interest was expressed in having a similar programme here. In previous years, I had had study sessions of a similar kind to those we would have on *upāsikā* days and there was a lot of interest around that. So we launched an *upāsikā* programme here from the very beginning, the first few months after we arrived.

Then the lay ministry developed in my mind – because the main emphasis here at Abhayagiri is on training the monastics. Also this is a large country and there are few people, who are familiar with the traditional Theravāda practice. Yet alongside this we get a lot of invitations and there is a lot of interest in this style of practice. So the thought occurred to take some of the people who have already been involved in the *upāsikā* programme for a long time and to develop a further form of training to help them better in what they were trying to do in terms of running a local group and so on.

AS: *So what kind of help do you think lay people need with running a local meditation group? I mean, what do you think they can learn from the monastery that they would not know by themselves?*

AA: A certain amount of training in the ceremonies; a certain amount of training in *sutta* studies – there is a great hungering for a knowledge base in terms of how to find your way around the Pāli Canon – what to read, what not to read; guidance in how to teach meditation – if you are in a position of leadership what to do about people's projections upon you as a leader, how to run a group without feeling you have got to be calling all the shots and telling everyone what to do – how to establish presence such that you can be a stable and helpful person who is holding a space, creating an environment for practice.

Then there are particular things, like performing weddings, that the monastics can't do. So from way back there was a feeling of 'well, wouldn't it be wonderful if some of the lay people could be trained up as, or got permission to be, those who can perform weddings.' In Britain it is a very complicated and lengthy process to get such authorisation; here it is a lot easier. The legalities around becoming an official minister of religion are much more relaxed. I believe there are one or two people (I know of at least one in Britain) who have that permission to perform weddings. Just as in other places, we get invited to do wedding blessings very regularly and so one of the functions a lay minister could perform

would be that kind of thing. And then also training in prison visiting; if you are officially a minister that makes getting into the prison system much easier....

So the lay ministry idea is two things really. The main part of it is both supporting lay people in the work that they are already doing – giving them a greater basis of meditation and scriptural knowledge, a greater connection with the monastery, a greater sense of support from us; and alongside that trying to provide some way, just as in Britain a number of years ago, of supporting the monastic community insofar as lay supporters being able to pick up various teaching engagements – like to schools and local groups – and being able to fill in where monastics would normally be invited to teach.

People who become monks and nuns, as you are very much aware, are usually not doing it in order to develop a career as a teacher. We are not a missionary order. For a lot of people who are drawn to this way of life a lot of the attraction is of seclusion. That is why we set up Abhayagiri very explicitly as a forest monastery, with people living in their own *kutis* in the forest; trying to set up a life which maximises the conditions for seclusion and being able to be alone in the forest. Therefore, with it being a big country and there being a lot of people out there, having a group of people who can then pick up a lot of the invitations to universities and local groups and other things helps to diversify the duties so that we can respond to interest. Then the Theravāda tradition can be represented in California or around the country without me having to bounce around all over the map. ❖

Vacancy for Trust Secretary

Each monastery has a steward body, guided by the Sangha, to receive and administer the many and generous donations given for its maintenance and for the support of Sangha Members resident there. This is because monks and nuns may only receive requisites (robes, almsfood, shelter and medicines), being prohibited by their rule from handling money or assuming power over personal funds.

The steward for the monasteries at Amaravati and Cittaviveka is the English Sangha Trust, a registered charity whose office is at Amaravati. Because the charity world is becoming ever more complex, it was decided over two years ago to employ a non-residential part-time Trust secretary/administrator on a salary. This has worked well.

The current post-holder is now leaving, and we are seeking a successor. At the time of writing it has yet to be decided whether to expand the post from part to full time, and whether to include publications management as part of its remit.

The job has proved to be quite varied: at any time you might find yourself in the roles of general and financial administrator, company secretary, committee administrator, researcher or project development worker. The ideal person would have the necessary skills and experience to be able to fulfil all these roles. Other obvious requirements would be an understanding and appreciation of the monastic tradition, and the personal qualities of a practising Buddhist.

If you are interested, please contact the Trust Secretary at Amaravati by the end of August, for more information and application details.



AMARAVATI NOTICES

Annual Gratitude to Parents Day to be held on Sunday 14th October at Amaravati. *All welcome.* 11.00am arrival for meal offering at 11.30am For further details contact Amaravati on 01442 842455 or Mr Chandhi Perera 0208 977 7642 (after 6.00pm)

HARTRIDGE NOTICE

25th–29th July Kittisaro and Thanissara will be visiting the monastery teaching the Saturday workshop on 28th. Visitors welcome. Enquiries – contact the monastery. At this time there is no resident monastic community at Hartridge. It is being used as a retreat facility for Sangha members. However, periodically (usually the last weekend of each month) there will be teaching given by visiting Sangha members.

These will comprise of a meditation workshop on Saturday afternoon (1.30 - 5.30) followed by tea and on Sunday, evening Pūjā at 7.30pm with Dhamma talk or questions. Of course, visitors will be welcome at any time on those weekends to help with meal offering and to speak to the monks or nuns. If you can offer help in the upkeep of the Monastery grounds or garden, the monastery resident, Paul, would be happy to hear from you. Tel: 01404 891251 or Sati-sati 01305 786821

CITTAVIVEKA NOTICES

Lay Forums

The venue of these discussions is the monastery's Reception Room, the time, 2:00pm.
Sunday, September 30th

Saturday, November 3rd
Sunday, December 2nd

GENERAL NOTICES

A Tribute to Maurice Walshe

A small book is being compiled comprising articles by the late Maurice O'C. Walshe. This has been sponsored for free distribution. If you would like to make a contribution to increase the number of copies that will be available, please contact 'Publications' at Amaravati.

Amaravati Cassette Library

There are many tapes being borrowed from the library at Amaravati, which have not been returned within the two week period. It would be very helpful to the tape librarian if these tapes could be returned as soon as possible.

NEWS FROM THE TRUSTS

The English Sangha Trust

The Trust's financial year ends in March, and the provisional figures for 2000/01 indicate a healthy financial position. It has been a quiet year at Amaravati, but, after the excitement of the Temple Opening last year, the community at the monastery has had a much-needed breathing space. Meanwhile at Cittaviveka, steady progress has been made with the building of the Dhamma Hall with every indication now that although building work will not be finished, the Hall will be usable in some way at Kathina.

Projects improving or replacing existing facilities are now queuing up for our attention. At Amaravati, in the bhikkhu vihara, the south corridor roof needs a complete overhaul, and in both the bhikkhu vihara and the siladhara vihara, there is a need for rewiring and improvements in the provision of hot water and shower facilities. At Cittaviveka, the conservatory is rotting away and needs replacing, and there is a need to increase the daytime facilities for the siladharas at the main house by converting the scullery attic.

The generous donations that supporters make help us pay for this work. However, we do also need people to manage the projects. If you have suitable experience and would welcome a long-term stay at either monastery to develop your Dhamma practice, then do get in touch. Also someone who would like to stay at Amaravati and take on the responsibility of kitchen co-ordinator would be appreciated.

At both monasteries there is always a stream of miscellaneous maintenance, gardening, repairs etc. to be done. If you have skills in particular areas that you could offer from time to time, we would be pleased to hear from you. At Amaravati there is a particular need for a plumber who could offer a day of their time on a regular basis, such as once a fortnight.

For people coming on a more casual basis, Cittaviveka holds occasional Gardening Days or Forest Work Days, and Amaravati holds occasional Work Weekends. Please contact the Work Co-ordinator at the respective monastery if you are interested.

On a different note, if there is a supporter out there who is a solicitor specialising in charity law and

company law, and who would like to make an offering of some of their time to the Trust, we would be pleased to hear from you.

We would also like to hear from you if you have experience of administering the production of publications. The help we need is principally progressing work from text to the finished product. If you are interested please contact the Trust Secretary at Amaravati.

The trustees for Aruna Ratanagiri

Monastery in Harnham, Northumberland, extend a warm welcome to anyone able to commit themselves for a minimum of two to three months as manager of the monastery's kitchen. The position would entail cooking 4 – 5 vegetarian meals per week for 5 – 9 people. At this stage it would be best if the person filling the post was male and between the ages of 24 – 60, ideally possessing a valid UK driver's license (but not essential). Private accommodation and food would be provided.

If you are interested in finding out more, please telephone Jody Higgs on 0131 3327987 or Email: trustees@ratanagiri.org.uk

We try to bring out the Newsletter quarterly, depending upon funds and written material. In the spirit of our relationship with lay people, we naturally depend upon donations: any contributions towards printing/distribution costs can be made to: 'The English Sangha Trust', Amaravati. In that same spirit, we ask you to let us know if you wish to be put on (or removed from) the mailing list, or if you have moved. Write to Newsletter, Amaravati. The newsletter is also available on the internet from: <http://www.fsnews.cjb.net>

Data Protection Act: The mailing list used for Forest Sangha Newsletter is maintained on computer. If you object to your record being kept on our computer file, please write to Newsletter, Amaravati, and we will remove it. This Newsletter is printed by: Ashford Printers, Harrow. Telephone – (020) 8427-5097

Teaching and Practice Venues

MEDITATION GROUPS	
These are visited regularly by Sangha members.	
BATH Catherine Hewitt, (01225) 405-235	LONDON BUDDHIST SOCIETY 58 Eccleston Square, SW1 (Victoria) (020) 7834 5858 Meditation Sundays: led by a monk or nun, every 2nd month. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Thursday classes – 6.00pm
EDINBURGH Muriel Nevin, (0131) 337-0901	
GLASGOW James Scott, (0141) 637-9731	
HAMPSTEAD Caroline Randall, (020) 8348-0537	SOUTH DORSET Barbara Cohen-Walters (Sati sati),(01305) 786-821
LEEDS AREA Daniella Loeb, (0113) 2791-375	SOUTHAMPTON Ros Dean (02380) 422430
Anne Voist, (01274) 691-447	SURREY/WOKING Rocanā, (01483) 761-398
MEDITATION GROUPS	
These meet regularly & receive occasional visits from Sangha.	
BEDFORD David Stubbs, (01234) 720-892	MAIDSTONE Tony Millett, (01634) 375-728
BELFAST Paddy Boyle, (02890) 427-720	MIDDLESBOROUGH Colin Walker, (01642) 643-071
BERKSHIRE Penny Henrion (01189) 662-646	MIDHURST Barry Durrant, (01730) 821-479
BRIGHTON Nimmala, (01273) 723-378	NEWCASTLE ON TYNE Andy Hunt, (0191) 478-2726
CAMBRIDGE Gillian Wills, (01954) 780-551	NORWICH Elaine Tattersall (01603) 260-717
CANTERBURY Charles Watters, (01227) 463342	PEMBROKESHIRE/S. WALES Peter and Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson, (01239) 820-790
DUBLIN Rupert Westrup, (01) 280-2832 (Dial: 00441 - from the UK)	PORTSMOUTH Dave Beal, (02392) 732-280
ESSEX (Billericay) Rob Howell, (01702) 482-134 or (Harlow) Pamutto, (01279) 724-330	REDRUTH Daniel Davide (01736) 753-175
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD Bodhinyāna Group Chris Ward (01442) 890-034	SHEFFIELD Greg Bradshaw (0114) 262-0265
LIVERPOOL Ursula Haeckel, (0151) 427 6668	STEYNING / SUSSEX Jayanti (01903) 812-130
LEIGH-ON-SEA Gool Deboo, (01702) 553-211	STROUD John Groves, 0796 7777-742
	TAUNTON Martin Sinclair, (01823) 321-059

AMARAVATI CASSETTES

Cassette tapes of Dhamma talks given by Ajahn Sumedho and other Sangha members, plus tapes of chanting and meditation instruction are available for sale at cost price. For catalogue and information send SAE to:

Amaravati Cassettes, Ty'r Ysgol Maenan,
Llanrwst, Gwynedd, LL26 OYD U.K.

Amaravati Retreats 2001:

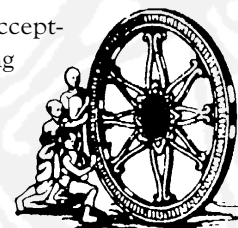


July	20 – 22	Weekend	Ajahn Candasiri
Sept.	7 – 16	10 Day	Ajahn Sumedho – FULLY BOOKED
Sept.	21 – 23	Weekend	(to be decided)
Oct.	5 – 14	10 Day	Ajahn Sucitto* – FULLY BOOKED
Oct.	19 – 21	Weekend	(to be decided)
Nov.	9 – 11	Weekend	(to be decided)
Nov.	23 – 26	3 Day	Buddhist/Christian with Ajahn Candasiri & Elizabeth West
Dec. 27 – Jan. 1	5 Day	(to be decided)	

*Experienced:(i.e. must have done at least one 10 day retreat)

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing any of the 5 or 10 day retreats.

Please note that bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form and booking deposit. The deposit is refundable on request, up to one month before the retreat starts. To obtain a booking form, please write to the Retreat Centre, stating which retreat you would like to do.



Retreat Centre Work Weekends 2001 November 2nd - 4th

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION—AMARAVATI Saturday Afternoon Classes 1.30 – 3.30 pm

Meditation instruction for beginners;
with an opportunity for questions
to be answered.

Classes are in the Bodhinyāna Meditation Hall.

Feel free to come along – no booking is necessary.

V I H A R A S

BRITAIN

◆ Amaravati Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ
Tel: (01442) 84-2455 (Office)
84-3411 (Guest Info.)
84-3239 (Retreat Info.)
Fax: (01442) 84-3721
*Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Amaravati.*

◆ Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay,
Northumberland
NE20 0HF
Tel: (01661) 88-1612
Fax: (01661) 88-1019
web site: www.ratanagiri.org.uk
e-mail: community@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: Magga Bhavaka Trust.

◆ Cittaviveka: Chithurst
Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield,
Hampshire GU31 5EU
Tel: (01730) 81-4986
Fax: (01730) 81-7334
*Stewards: English Sangha Trust,
Cittaviveka.*

◆ Hartridge Buddhist
Monastery,
Uppottery, Honiton,
Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (01404) 89-1251
Fax: (01404) 89-0023
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust.

THAILAND

◆ Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubun Rajathani 34310

AUSTRALIA

◆ Bodhinyana Monastery
Lot 1, Kingsbury Drive,
Serpentine 6125 WA
Tel: (08) 952-52420
Fax: (08) 952-53420

◆ Dhammaloka Buddhist
Centre (Perth)
18-20 Nanson Way,
Nollamara 6061 WA
Tel: (08) 934-51711
Fax: (08) 934-44220
*Stewards: Buddhist Society of
Western Australia.*

ITALY

◆ Santacittarama
Via Delle Prata 22
Località Brulla
02030 Frasso Sabino (Rieti)
Italy
Tel: (06) 765 872-186
Fax: (06) 233 238-629
Web site: www.santacittarama.org
(written in Italian)
*Stewards:
Santacittarama No 20163/38.*

SWITZERLAND

◆ Dhammapala
Buddhistisches Kloster
Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 675-2100
Fax: 033 / 675-2241
*Stewards:
Dhammapala 31921-201-5.*

NORTH AMERICA

◆ Abhayagiri Monastery,
16201 Tomki Road,
Redwood Valley,
CA 95470
Tel: (707) 485-1630
Fax: (707) 485-7948
(Sangha literature and
West Coast newsletters are
distributed from here.)
Web site: www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation.

◆ Boston Area:
Buddhaparisa, Boston,
Mass. Tel: (781) 861-6837
Mailing for E. Coast USA
& Thailand: to be placed on
the mailing list, please write
directly to Amaravati.

NEW ZEALAND

◆ Bodhinyanarama
17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Wellington 6008
Tel: (+ + 64) 4 563-7193
Fax: (+ + 64) 4 563-5125
e-mail: sangha@actrix.gen.nz
*Stewards:
Wellington Theravada Buddhist
Association.*

◆ Auckland Buddhist Vihara
29 Harris Road,
Mount Wellington,
Auckland
Tel: (+ + 64) 9 579-55443

KATHINA & ALMSGIVING CEREMONIES

All welcome – for further information
please contact the monasteries;

Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham), 7th October
*Contact: Khun Wanjai Poonum
Tel. 01483 536092 or 01483 857575*

Cittaviveka, 21st October
*Contact: Khun Chatrabut Lancaster
Tel. (020) 866 86909*

Santacittarama (Italy), 14th October
Amaravati, 28th October

Dhammapala (Switzerland), 4th November

Please use the contact person detailed if you would like
to offer any help with any of the arrangements.

OBSERVANCE DAYS

On these days the community devotes itself to quiet reflection and
meditation. Visitors are welcome to join in the evening meditation
vigils, and on the Full and New moon, there is an opportunity to
determine the Eight Precepts for the night.

Moon Phase	☉ FULL	☾ HALF	● NEW	☽ HALF
JULY	☼5 (Thurs)	13 th (Fri)	20 th (Fri)	28 th (Sat)
AUGUST	4 th (Sat)	12 th (Sun)	18 th (Sat)	26 th (Sun)
SEPTEMBER	2 nd (Sun)	10 th (Mon)	17 th (Mon)	25 th (Tues)
OCTOBER	☽2 nd / 31 st	10 th (Wed)	16 th (Tues)	24 th (Wed)

☼ Āsālha Pūjā (Vassa begins next day) ☽ Pavāranā Day (Vassa ends)

If undelivered, please return to: AMARAVATI MONASTERY

Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP1 3BZ, England

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information for fellow Buddhists, or comments on the Newsletter itself
(please send c/o 'Newsletter' to your local monastery). For permission to
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Closing date for submission to the next issue is 20th August 2001