I teach meditation like this: When it’s time to sit in meditation, then sit. Allow your mind to experience things and consider their nature, seeing them as transient, not perfect and ownerless. It’s all uncertain. No matter how much you like something, you should reflect that it’s uncertain.

Some kinds of food seem so delicious, but still you should reflect that it’s not a sure thing. It may seem that it’s sure, that it’s so delicious, but still you must tell yourself, “Not sure!” If you want to test out whether it’s sure or not, try eating your favorite food every day. Every single day, mind you. Eventually you’ll complain, “This doesn’t taste so good anymore.”

Practise in all postures. You can experience anger in any posture, walking, sitting, standing, lying down, right? Also, you can experience desire in any posture. So our practice must extend to all postures; it must be consistent. Don’t just put on a show, really do it.

Practice isn’t just sitting. Some people sit until they fall into a stupor. They might as well be dead; they can’t tell north from south. Don’t take it to such an extreme. If you feel sleepy then walk, change your posture. If you are really tired then have a rest. As soon as you wake up continue the practice. Don’t let yourself drift around in a stupor. You must practise like this.

Some people complain, “I can’t meditate, I’m too restless. Whenever I sit down I just think of this and that. I can’t do it. I’ve got too much bad kamma. I should use up my bad kamma first and then come back and try meditating.” Sure, just try it. Try using up your bad kamma.

These so-called hindrances are the things we must study. They are what you’re supposed to be studying! Most people refuse to learn their lessons, like naughty schoolboys refusing to do their homework. They don’t want to see the mind changing. But then, how are they going to develop wisdom?

Whenever we sit, the mind immediately goes running off. We follow it and try to bring it back and observe it once more. Then it goes off again. We have to live with change like this. When we know that the mind is this way, constantly changing, when we know that this is its nature, we will have understood it. If we understand this point, then even while we are thinking we can be at peace.

Whatever sensations you experience, regard them like monkeys. For instance, suppose at home you have a pet monkey. Monkeys don’t stay still for long: they like to jump around and grab things. That’s how monkeys are. If you go to the forest and see the monkeys there, you’ll see those monkeys don’t stay still either. They jump around just like your pet monkey. But they don’t bother you, do they? Why don’t they bother you? Because you’ve raised a monkey before; you know what monkeys are like. If you know just one monkey, then no matter where you go, you won’t be bothered by them, will you? Because you understand monkeys.

If you don’t understand monkeys you may become a monkey yourself! Do you understand? When you see it reaching for this and that, you shout, “Hey, stop!” You get angry. “That damned monkey!” This is one who doesn’t
understand monkeys. One who understands monkeys sees that the monkey at home and the monkeys in the forest are just the same. Why get annoyed by them? When you understand monkeys, that’s enough: you can be at peace.

We should look at sensations in the same way. Some sensations are pleasant, some are unpleasant: that’s how sensations are. We should look at them as we look at monkeys. We understand that sometimes they are agreeable, sometimes not – that’s just their nature. If we understand them in this way, we can let them go. When eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind receive sensations, we know the sensations just like we know monkeys. Thus we can be at peace.

When sensations arise, just know them. Why do you run after them? Sensations are uncertain. One minute they are one way, the next minute another. Their existence depends on change. For all of us here too, our existence depends on change. The breath goes out, then it must come in. It must have this change. Try only breathing in: can you do it? Or try just breathing out without breathing in: can you do it? If there was no change like this how long would you live? There must be both the in- and the out-breath.

For the really earnest student, sensations are not a problem. But many meditators shrink away from sensations; they don’t want to deal with them. This is like the naughty schoolboy again, who won’t go to school, who won’t listen to the teacher. All sensations are teaching us. When we contemplate sensations, we are practising Dhamma. The peace within sensations comes from understanding them, just like understanding monkeys. When you understand monkeys, you are no longer troubled by them.

The practice of Dhamma is like this. It’s not that Dhamma is far away. It’s right here. Dhamma isn’t about the angels on high or anything like that. It’s simply about us, about what we are doing right now. Observe yourself. Sometimes there is happiness, sometimes suffering; sometimes comfort, sometimes pain; sometimes love, sometimes hate. This is Dhamma. Do you see it? To know Dhamma, you have to read your own experience.

You must know sensations before you can let them go. When you see that sensations are impermanent you will be untroubled by them. As soon as a sensation arises, just say to yourself, “Hmm, this is not a sure thing.” When your mood changes, “Hmm, not sure.” You can be at peace with these things, just like watching monkeys and not being bothered by them. If you know the truth of sensations, you know Dhamma. Then you let go of sensations, seeing that they are all invariably uncertain.

If we really see uncertainty clearly, we will see that which is certain. What is certain is that things must inevitably be how they are; they cannot be otherwise. Do you understand? Knowing just this much you know the Buddha, you rightly do reverence to him.

If you don’t throw out the Buddha you won’t suffer, but as soon as you do, you will. As soon as you throw out the reflections on transience, unsatisfactoriness and ownerlessness you’ll suffer. If you can practise just this much it’s enough; suffering won’t arise, or if it does, you’ll settle it easily. This is the end of our practice, when suffering doesn’t arise. Why doesn’t suffering arise? Because we have sorted out the cause of it.

For instance, if you are fond of a glass, you might say: “Don’t break my glass!” But can you prevent something that’s breakable from breaking? If it doesn’t break now it will break later. If you don’t break it, someone else will. If someone else doesn’t break it, one of the chickens will! The Buddha advises us to accept this. Penetrating the truth of these things, we should see this glass as if it was already broken; that is, see the broken glass within the unbroken one. Do you understand this? Use the glass, look after it, until the day when it slips out of your hand. Smash! No problem. Why is that? Because for you, it was broken before it broke.

Usually people say, “I love this glass so much, I hope it never breaks.” Later on the dog breaks it. “I’ll kill that dog!” You hate the dog for breaking your glass. If one of your children breaks it, you’ll hate them too. Why is this? Because you’ve dammed yourself up: the water can’t escape. You’ve made a dam without a spillway. The only thing such a dam can do is burst, right? When you make a dam you must also make a spillway, so when the water rises up too high, it can then flow off safely. When it gets too full, you open the spillway. You have to have a safety valve like this.

Impermanence is the safety valve of the Noble Ones. If you have this safety valve you will be at peace.
At this point, I would like to come back to describe what it was that moved me to become a nun. I had lived what could be called an eventful life. I hadn’t planned it that way, it had just come about on its own. I had seen the world. I had had children and grand-children. I had been poor and I had been rich. I had lived in a trailer with a camp stove and a fold-up bed. I had had a farm. I had experienced the life of suburban America. I had been a secretary in a bank. Thus, I had had and tried more or less everything. But all that I have enumerated in this book was past and gone. Everything I have recorded here is simply memory. There is much more that I cannot even remember. It has simply vanished in the stream of time. What more could the world still have to offer me? The world does not bring one inner peace and happiness, because everything that happens in the world is impermanent. So, where should I still seek anything, other than within myself?

Becoming a nun was for me the next logical step in my development. Today I see that my past led me naturally to this path. My experiences made it possible for me to let go of a great deal of fear: fear for myself and fear for my fellow human beings. I saw that it is possible to deal with any situation in life, whether it is in the Amazon Basin or in thin air of Hunza. You can get through anything if you just go with the flow of events. I learned to discipline myself in matters of bodily comfort. For me that was an enormous advance. In my childhood I was spoiled by the ultimate in comfort. In Shanghai, my parents provided me with a house that was just like the old days. In America as a young woman, I lived in as much comfort as a lovely suburban house could provide. And then the comfortable life came to an end. I learned to sleep on a beach with mosquitoes, to travel in a hollowed-out tree trunk down a river in incandescent heat. I never mourned for the loss of my comfort, because I learned that you can do without it. That was a really important learning process, a letting go of outer conditions. And that brought a great deal of inner freedom. It lifted me up to a level where the spiritual aspect of life had priority.

During the years of development in Sri Lanka and in Germany a great deal of the force that I expended arose from the feeling that I had no time to lose. I had known since 1983 that I had cancer. I had felt a lump under my breast and had gone to see a doctor in Australia. She sent me for a mammogram. Diagnosis: malignant tumour. At that time we had just begun building the convent in Sri Lanka on the island in Lake Ratgama. I really wanted to finish it, and was feeling completely healthy and strong. I told the doctor that I did not want an operation, because I didn’t want to be drawn into the cycle of hospital treatment, which, once one is in it, is hard to get out of. The doctor looked at me for a long time; I can still remember it. She told me that her mother had also been ill with breast cancer and had made exactly the same decision. She did not permit herself to be operated on, and had lived on for fifteen years with the disease. She was sick for only the last two months; then she died. That suits me fine, I told her. I’d like to do it the same way.

What the illness did for me during the next years was to create the consciousness of urgency – samvega in Pali, which the Buddha always praised – the urgency of practising the
spiritual path, because after all, nobody knows how long they are going to live. When you have cancer, you recognize this fact even more clearly. Every birth is a death sentence. There is no one who survives life. We usually push this death sentence out of our minds, and live as though we had an infinitely long time in front of us.

This feeling of urgency motivated me strongly to bring the project of the Nuns’ Island to completion, so that a large number of women could practise there under optimal conditions. I also wanted to complete a great number of books in order to make the teachings of the Buddha more available in German. When I was young, I had made up my mind that sometime I would write a great novel. I had had a glorious vision of holding up in my hand a book that I had written. Although I never got round to writing a novel, by now twenty-five books of mine have been published. It is no longer anything special for me to sign my own book. But I am happy that through these books Dhamma is being spread.

The Buddha did not call his doctrine ‘Buddhism’, but ‘Dhamma’, which means ‘natural law’ or ‘absolute truth’. People who come to hear what I have to say, people who attend my seminars and courses, do not have to be or become Buddhists. The Buddha never used this word. He said, we are practitioners; practitioners in the sphere of knowledge. Whether a person is a Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jew, or Hindu is a matter of indifference to me. I don’t divide people into such affiliations, which separate them from each other even more than they are already.

The Buddha had only one interest: to show every human how he or she can become absolutely happy. He never sought disciples and followers. This is my approach also. Whether visitors describe themselves as Catholic or atheist is of no importance. If they are seeking the inner way, I want to help them to find that which lives in all of us – pure peace, pure happiness. It is not my idea to proclaim Buddhism as the only salvation. I want to show people in Germany that the spiritual path can be travelled within every religion and to help them make a connection to a deeper inner contemplation.

The most important teaching, of which in Europe I am more or less alone in teaching, is the instruction for the meditative absorptions. These are levels of consciousness that are entirely different from those that people are accustomed to. They were taught by the Buddha; he practised and praised them highly. These levels of consciousness broaden our horizons and make possible for us a glimpse of the cosmic process. Every person who practises with patience reaches such states of complete concentration. It is in this way that a person can find a way into the inner space of his or her mind, where absolute purity and clarity prevail.

In 1993 the lump in my breast, whose growth I could constantly feel, broke open. It was very painful and it bled almost continuously. So finally I had to undergo an operation. After the operation, there were two days during which I had the feeling that my vitality was ebbing away; more precisely, I felt it flowing away through the soles of my feet. I was absolutely reconciled to this. I was ready to die, and gave myself over entirely to the pleasant feeling of letting go. Then a great many cards and flowers from my students arrived that not only spoke of their love, but also told me to just stay alive – I didn’t need to teach anymore. That made a deep impression on me and encouraged me a lot. In the visits the doctors made, and in the care from the nurses, I perceived...
what great efforts people were making to keep me alive. At that point I resolved to help them succeed in this, and against all expectations, I recovered very nicely.

After that, I had three further operations, the last one in November of 1995. During this last operation, a strange thing occurred. Although I was fully anaesthetized, I suddenly heard an unknown doctor saying, “Oh, for God’s sake, something has to be done immediately!” I saw him clearly, although my eyes were tightly closed. I saw him trying without success to get a needle into one of my veins and in the process getting more and more nervous. I tried to infuse him with calmness. The other doctors around me were becoming impatient. This contributed further to the nervousness of the anaesthetist. He finally switched his efforts to my right hand and found a vein which, with a sigh of relief, he found usable. It was clear to me that my blood pressure had gone down tremendously. I heard someone say it was “eighty over fifty” and that this was life-threatening. I was also clearly aware that my body was lying there entirely numb and that in the meantime my mind had separated from my body and was watching the whole proceedings from a bird’s-eye view. My mind was absolutely calm. I only felt bad for the doctors. I wanted to help them attain calmness as well.

Everything that I have lived through from that time on is, so to speak, a bonus. To have finished my life, and then still to be here for a period of time, now already four years, and to be able to finish some last things, is without doubt a great gift. I am careful to use the time that remains to me very selectively. I only do things now that seem to me valuable and useful.

One of the great teachers of our time was a monk from Thailand, Ajahn Chah. He used to describe the three marks of existence – suffering, impermanence, and insubstantiality – by means of a simile: “Look here at this glass,” he would say. “It is very useful to me. I can drink out of it. But when it falls to the ground, it is destroyed. In fact for me,” he said, “it is destroyed already. For me, all that is and all that will be, has happened already.” This simile is very meaningful for me. My glass is also broken already. In 1993, for me, my life came to an end. Now, although my body is there again, and although I am still able use it, it has as little meaning for me as a broken glass. In anything that I have done since that time, the sense of a personal relationship to it has been missing. I do things presuming that they are helpful. I take pleasure in being able to see things develop for a little while longer. But when this life comes to its end, nothing important will happen. Everything will have happened already.

My encounter with death has definitely contributed to my ability to propagate the Teaching in a way that has nothing to do with my own identity. I am not only unimportant; I experience myself as being not even present, except as a mouthpiece for saying things that might help people. I will live as long as it is determined that I should do so, then everything can go on without me.

In this chapter I have written a great deal about death, because fear of death is a theme so frequently raised with me by people who hear my talks. I am continually confronted with the subject. Until we have fully accepted our own death and related to it lovingly and with devotion, our life is bound up with fear. True peace can only enter our hearts when we see things the way they really are.

NOTICEBOARD

AMARAVATI NOTICES

Sunday Talks at Amaravati: Every Sunday between July 24 and October 2 at 2pm. One hour talk followed by tea and discussion. All welcome.

Annual Gratitude to Parents Day will be Sunday 2 October, 11.00 am arrival for 11.30 meal offering. Public talk at 2 pm followed by tea and discussion. Enquiries to Mr. Chandy Perera. Tel: 0208 977 7642 after 6 pm, or phone Amaravati office. All welcome.

Kathina Celebration will be October 23. All welcome. To offer help, contact Anne Jameson 01234-714148 or a.jameson@btinternet.com

Introduction to Meditation
Every Saturday, 2pm till 4pm in the Bodhinyana Hall. All welcome. No booking necessary.

The Bodhinyana Group meets in the Bodhinyana Hall on Wednesdays at 7.30pm for chanting, meditation and discussion. All welcome. For information, see: http://www.buddhacommunity.org

Amaravati Lay Events: Retreats
July 22-26: Amaravati Lay Events: Retreats
http://www.buddhacommunity.org
For information, see: meditation and discussion. All welcome.

Kathina Celebration: will be October 23. All welcome. To offer help, contact Anne Jameson 01234-714148 or a.jameson@btinternet.com

RATANAGIRI NOTICES

Kathina Celebration: will be Oct 30, starting at 10am. All welcome. Contact persons: Mrs Petchara Watson. Tel: 01642 592 528 and Mrs Jongjai Eastwood Tel: 01642 710 165.

Retreat House Building Project: help requested
If you would like to offer help with building the Retreat Centre, short or long term, please contact Tom Pickering on 0191-4194463 or the monastery on 01661-881612. We are particularly interested in people with carpentry and general building skills.

HARTRIDGE NOTICES

Saturday Meditation Workshops: July 30; Aug 27; Sept 24.

GENERAL NOTICES

Sunnyata Retreat Centre, Ireland

Buddhist Society Summer School
Aug 27-Sept 3 at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. The teaching and practice of all Buddhist schools. Contact: Summer School Secretary, The Buddhist Society, 58 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PH. All welcome.

Buddhist/Christian Retreat at Turvey Abbey
Oct 7-9: Meditation and Mindfulness. Contact: Sister Lucy, Turvey Abbey, Turvey, MK43 8DE.

Dhamma talks on Tape Cassettes
Recordings of Dhamma talks given by the Sangha, as well as chanting and meditation. For catalogue and information send SAE to Amaravati Cassettes, Ty’r Ysgol Maenan, Llanrwst, Gwynedd. LL26 0YD, UK.

Dhamma talks and Guided Meditation: Audio and text files can be found on these websites:
http://www.abhayagiri.org
http://www.amaravati.org
http://www.bsua.org
http://www.dhammatalks.org.uk
http://www.forestsangha.org
http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk

NEWSLETTER

This issue’s photographs:

Page 8: Luang Por Chah © Wat Pah Nanachat, Thailand

Other pages: Amaravati Forest Sangha Newsletter Online
The current and many previous issues of the Forest Sangha Newsletter are now available to view or download from http://www.fsnewsletter.net or by following the link from http://www.amaravati.org. For printing purposes, PDF versions are recommended. Broadband connection may be necessary. I would appreciate your comments on this: editor@amaravati.org. We may be able to reduce file sizes in future.

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For delivery in the USA, please write to Abhayagiri Monastery or see their website. For all other countries, please write to Newsletter c/o Amaravati Monastery. Full addresses overleaf.

Contact for Newsletter Business:
editor@amaravati.org

Newsletter Website Change of Address
The Newsletter will soon move to http://www.fsnewsletter.amaravati.org
Teaching & Practice Venues

MEDITATION GROUPS WHICH ARE VISITED REGULARLY BY SANGHA MEMBERS

Bath  Thursday-Weekly  Bill & Carol Huxley  (01225) 314 500
Edinburgh  Thursday-Weekly  Neil Howell  (0131) 226 5044
Glasgow  1st Friday-Monthly  James Scott  (0141) 637 9731
Leeds Area  Friday-Weekly  Daniela Loeb  (0113) 279 1375
           Anne Grimshaw  (01274) 691 447
Hampstead  1st & 3rd Wednesday -Monthly
           1 Hillside (Room 6) London NW5  Caroline Randall  (020) 8348 0537
           Entrance in Highgate Road  Ann Booth  (020) 7485 0505
London Buddhist Society
           58 Eccleston Square London SW1(Victoria)  (020) 7834 5858
           Sundays, 10am-5pm, every second month: Meditation led by a monk or nun.
           Thursday meditation classes, weekly, 6pm.
Southampton  1st & 3rd Thursday-Monthly  Ivor Minard  (023) 8089 4890

MEDITATION GROUPS WHICH MEET REGULARLY & RECEIVE OCCASIONAL VISITS FROM THE SANGHA

Bedford  David Stubbs  (01234) 720 892
Belfast  Sunday-Weekly  Paddy Boyle  (02890) 427 720
Berkshire  2nd & 4th Wed-Monthly  Anthea West  (0118) 979 8101
Brighton  Wednesday-Weekly  Nimmala  (01273) 723 378
Cambridge  Sunday-Fortnightly  Dan Jones  (01223) 246 257
Canterbury  Sunday-Fortnightly  Charles Watters  (01227) 463 342
Carlisle  2nd & 4th Wed-Monthly  Jean Nelson  (01228) 543491
Co. Clare-Ireland  Wed-Weekly  Sunyata Centre  (00353) 61 367 073
Dublin  Rupert Westrup  (01) 280 2832  (Dial:0041 from the UK)
Harlow  Mondays-Weekly  Pamutto  (01279) 724330
Hemel Hempstead  Bodhyanaga Group  Wed-Weekly in school term times
               See notice on page 6  Chris Ward  (01442) 890034
Kendal  Sunday-Monthly  Fellside Centre, Low Fellside
               Sumertha  (01539) 729 793
Liverpool  2nd and 4th Monday of each month  Ursula Haeckel  (0151) 4276668
London-Notting Hill  Tuesday-Weekly  Jeffery Craig  (0207) 221 9330
Leigh-on-sea  Rob Howell  (01702) 482 134
Machynlleth-Mid Wales  Monday-Weekly  Angela Llewellyn  (01650) 511350
Midhurst  2nd & 4th Wed-Monthly  Barry Durrant  (01730) 821 479
Newcastle-on-Tyne  Wed-Weekly  Andy Hunt  (0191) 478 2726
Newent-Gloucs  Friday-Every 3 Weeks  Email: john.teire@virgin.net  John Teire  (01531) 821 902
Norwich  2nd Thursday & last Mon Monthly  Ian Thompson  (01603) 629129
Pembroke - S Wales  Weekly meeting & other events  Peter & Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson  (01239) 820 790
Penzance  Mondays-Weekly  Lee  (01736) 762 135
Perth  Saturday-Every 2 Weeks  Neil Abbot  (07765) 667 499
Portsmouth  1st Mon-Monthly  Medhavi  (02392)732 280
Redruth  Wednesdays-Weekly  Vanessa  (01209) 214 031
Sheffield  Greg Bradshaw  (0114)262 1559
           Email: greg.bradshaw@btclick.com

South Dorset  Thursday-Weekly  Barbara Cohen  (Sati-sati)  (01305) 786 821
Steyning-Sussex  Jayant (01903) 812 130
Stroud  John Groves  (07967) 777 742
Surrey-Woking  Wed-Weekly  Rocana  (01483) 761 398
Teesside Theravada Buddhist Group  Wed or Thursday Weekly
           David Williams  (01642) 603 481
           and John Doyle  (01642)587 274
Totnes  Wednesday-Weekly  Jerry  (01803) 840 199

Amaravati Retreats

2005 RETREATS SCHEDULE:

July 3-16  Ajahn Vimalo  Retreat Full
July 29-31  Work Weekend  (see below for details)
August 5-7  Ajahn Kongrit  Weekend
           (For Thai speakers only)
August 12-16  Ajahn Sundara  Retreat Full
           Sept 2-4  Sister Mettā  Retreat Full
           Sept 16-25  Ajahn Sumedho  Retreat Full
           Oct 7-16  Ajahn Candasiri  Retreat Full
           Oct 28-30  Ajahn Anandabodhi  Weekend
           Nov 11-13  Sr Mettā & Sr Santacittā  Weekend
           Nov 25-29  Ajahn Vajiro  5 day
           Dec 9-11  Buddhist-Christian  Weekend
           Dec 27-Jan 1 2006  Ajahn Nyanarato  Retreat Full

General Guidelines
All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners.
It is best to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat.
Due to demand, people may join only three retreats a year. Retreats are run on a
donation-only basis.

Booking Procedure
Bookings can only be made with a booking form.
Bookings cannot be made by email or telephone.
If you want to know whether you have secured a place on a retreat or are on the
waiting list, please send us either a stamped addressed envelope or your email
address.

Start and Finish Times
Registration is from 4pm to 7pm on the first day of the retreat. The orientation
talk is at 7.15pm.
Weekend retreats end at 4pm. Other retreats end at lunchtime.

Work Weekend
Participants gather on Friday evening. Work begins on Saturday morning.
Part-time attendance is also welcomed. Please email or write in for an
application form.

Contact Information:
Tel :01442 843 239
Email: retreats@amaravati.org
Website: http://www.amaravati.org

July 2005
OBSERVANCE DAYS

On these days some monasteries are given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome to participate in the evening meditation vigils. At Amaravati on the full and new moons, there is an opportunity to determine the Eight Precepts for the night.

### OBSERVANCE DAYS

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- ♡ Pavarana Day (Vassa ends)
- ♡ Anapanasati Day

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