Under the Bodhi Tree
Ajahn Thaniya

"It’s the Buddha’s birthday" someone said this morning, and I found myself surprised – I guess because Wesak is, so much to me, the day I recollect the Buddha’s awakening, the historical Buddha and that which he realized, nibbana (liberation; the end of suffering). But Wesak is also the day we recollect his birth, as well as his Parinibbana (the Buddha’s final passing away). There is something very powerful in the image of these three together, the birth, the awakening and the Parinibbana, in the way they relate the conventional reality and the transcendent. The sense that a being was born, having been born, dies; which is the predicament that we all share. And we have within that the transcendent aspect; that the Buddha was born but within his own life-span he realized that which is not born and does not die, the ‘super-mundane’ or transcendent. So today we recollect both the mundane or conventional – the fact that here we are in all of this – as well as the fact that there is awakening. Rather than separate them we keep those things together.

The tendency is to make ideals about it all. The Buddha image in this hall is wonderful in those terms: shiny and golden and so peaceful, and around it you can’t see all the arrows of Mara (the personification of delusion and desire). Sitting here tonight I recalled the painting that is up at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery – many of you will have seen it – on the back wall of the Dhamma Hall there. I appreciate that image because the Buddha is sitting there on the night of his awakening and all around him are the forces of chaos, big elephants and various relatives of Mara riding all kinds of beasts and demons attacking the Buddha and, as I said, there are all those arrows. Yes, that’s what it feels like, doesn’t it? This is the reality within which the Buddha awakened. It’s an encouraging image because through it we can realize the turmoil we experience is not an obstacle, it’s not something going wrong. It is actually the ground of awakening. Here is where we can both taste what is binding us and have the opportunity of releasing it.

That whole classical image of the night of the Buddha’s awakening is very important in its symbology. On the beautiful painting at Aruna Ratanagiri you have all these forces of chaos and negativity, confusion, ignorance, greed, hatred – all Mara’s forces coming in on the Buddha. And in response, he touches the Earth. This is the Earth-touching mudra (symbolic hand gesture), the mudra of
Arrows and Clouds

THE VARIOUS OFFERINGS in this Forest Sangha Newsletter have come together with the first frost of November in crisp, wintery air, under a winterish sun in a winter-blue sky, frost raked up this morning with the spent yellow birch leaves curled below my window at Amaravati. The coming of winter, for the monastic communities here in Europe (it’s summer at Bodhyanarama), has long signalled the time for our monasteries to put things down and prepare for the Winter Retreat, shedding spent involvements like frosty dried up leaves.

Or so we may hope. Whatever the ideal, we practise with what is, encouraged to become clearly aware of what we perceive through the six senses – the five physical senses as well as the sixth: the mental, the world of emotion and thought. As Ajahn Thaniya eloquently reflects in her talk Under the Bodhi Tree, it’s through awareness of the touch of what is actually present – what is here, experienced through our senses right now, and not what we want or think should be happening or believing in how things seem – that an awakening is possible to our life just as it is. Yet this awakening requires support. Ajahn Thaniya uses the classical story of the Buddha’s Awakening under the Bodhi Tree to consider this, noting that the bodhisatta himself had to call upon the resources of his past cultivation in order to meet the challenge. Attacked by the armies of Mara with their arrows of delusion and seduction, he responds by calling witness to the merit of his skilful actions – summed up in the qualities called ‘perfections’, or paramis. In the face of this moral force Mara’s arrows become flowers and his armies are washed away.

The depiction of this scene in the mural at the back of the Dhamma Hall at Aruna Ratanagiri, or Harnham, provided one of the backdrops to a large gathering last October of old and new friends and supporters of that monastery, for a celebration of the 25th anniversary of its foundation as well as the annual Kathina. In his article, Triple Celebration of the Triple Gem, Ajahn Munindo reflects on the many blessings of that occasion, which was three-in-one: anniversary/Kathina; the ordination of two young men; and a meeting of the Elders’ Council (EC). “Mindfulness overcomes all things” read the souvenir bags produced for the anniversary event: he comments that if they had believed in the way things seemed to be, the monastery at Harnham would probably no longer exist. Having produced yet another beautiful Sangha calendar for 2007, this one celebrating the 15th anniversary of Luang Por Chah’s passing (a specially-sponsored edition featuring framing-quality photographs), Ajahn Munindo recalls Ajahn Chah’s counsel to create a legacy of communal harmony. Referring to Ajahn Amaro’s history of the EC in the October issue of the FSN, he observes how over the years the leaders of our community have learned to support each other. It is a process that has resulted in the current EC structure, and this is working well – it’s a structure that has emerged from living out this life together rather than from a preconceived plan or ideal.

One theme threading through this issue, then, is trust. We cannot trust the way things seem. We learn to trust in mindfulness and skilful effort, the practice of the Eightfold Path, our own goodness and that of others, to bear the fruits worth picking. Ajahn Sucitto’s piece The Dhamma of Walking touches on all this too, in describing the practice of consciously walking long and sleeping rough.

“Are the clouds wrong?” we are asked in Ajahn Thaniya’s talk. So easy to grab for the quick answer through thought – overlooking the way we frame the inquiry, and what that might teach us. This is perhaps a lesson more appreciated by our monastic communities over the years as they establish themselves, moving out of the pioneering phases often fuelled by ideals, and ‘learning how to learn’ the lessons needed to move ahead – when that may require abandoning the ideal for nothing more clear than simple trust in the path of practice. It being the end of another year, I invited the monasteries to offer something here by way of a little report checking-in with what’s been happening in 2006.

Finally, I know that all of us in the Sangha wish to express our great gratitude and anumodana to Chitra and Suji De Silva, long-time supporters and for the past two decades, as owners of Ashford Printers, responsible for the printing of the Forest Sangha Newsletter. Chitra and Suji have now sold the business, yet have continued to help us with the transition; and, in an inspiring act of dana they have offered to cover much of the cost of printing for these first few issues with the new company. May they both long draw upon the goodness of these generous acts.

Bhikkhu Jayanto (Editor)
Night of Awakening
The mural at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery painted by Pang Chinasai. It depicts the story of the Buddha’s Awakening in traditional iconographic style: Resolved not to leave his place under the Bodhi Tree until either he realizes nibbana or dies, the Bodhisatta is challenged by Mara, personification of evil and temptation, whose armies launch an attack. Underneath the Buddha-to-be is the traditional Thai representation of Mother Earth (Mae Toranee), shown wringing her hair of his accumulated virtue which in a flood washes the armies away. Their arrows are transformed into flowers in the air.

Glossary — Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter (not otherwise defined)

Please note: Due to typographical limitations, Pali diacritics have been omitted throughout. Below are brief descriptions of how these words are being used in this issue of the FSN; they are not full definitions.

Ajahn: (Thai) Senior monk or nun; literally ‘teacher’. Used for those with ten vassas or more, regardless of their role in the community.
anagarika: A male or female postulant in the preliminary noviciate stage.
anumodana: An expression of appreciative acknowledgement of skilful action performed.
bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk.
bodhisatta: “A being (striving) for Awakening”; the term used to describe the Buddha before he became Buddha.
Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.
Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
Dhammacakka: “Dhamma-wheel”; the symbol of a wheel representing the Buddha’s teaching.
Kathina: A requisites-offering ceremony held at a monastery after the vassa has been completed.
kuti: A hut, usually in the forest.

Luang Por: (Thai) A title of affectionate respect (lit. “Venerable Father”)
pabbajja: “Going forth”; ordination into the mendicant life.
Patimokkha: The basic code of discipline the Buddha established for his ordained disciples.
samanera: A novice monk.
Sangha: The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns.
sutta: A discourse of the Buddha.
Tan: (Thai) A title of respect.
Theravada: The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.
upasaka: A male lay-follower (upasika: female) of the Buddha.
upasampada: “Acceptance”: ordination as a bhikkhu.
vassa: The summer “Rains” retreat; a mark of how many years (“vassas”) a monk or nun has been in robes.
Vinaya: The monastic discipline.

Last issue
Missing pages: Unfortunately, some copies of the last issue (no. 77) were printed with missing or duplicated pages. It would help us determine the extent of the problem if you would contact the editor if you received a problem copy.

Last issue
Website Slideshow: Apologies, it hasn’t worked out as promised. Please see the note on page 18 in Grapevine/Amaravati/Website.
Contact – FSN Editor, Amaravati; e-mail: editor at amaravati dot org.
awakening. And awakening involves knowing the way things are. It’s not about changing anything, it’s about actually knowing directly the way things are. That gesture represents the Buddha’s response to Mara’s challenge, he calls the Earth as his witness. What the Earth is asked to be a witness to is his accumulated merit, his accumulated goodness. In touching the Earth, the Buddha touches into this recollection of his own virtue, his goodness and aspiration, and this gives the power that allows the mind to release itself. It’s not happening in a vacuum. The Earth responds by wringing water from her hair, the accumulated virtue of the Buddha, and the forces of Mara are washed away.

The Buddha had resources that enabled the awakening. He contacted, was nourished and gained strength from the accumulated paramis, or ‘perfections’ of his life. As we know, the Buddha took myriad births, accumulating spiritual strengths, emotional strengths; strengths of patience, morality, generosity, loving kindness, equanimitiy, renunciation…. Then in the timeless night of the Awakening, this is the stuff he called upon.

**Something is going wrong**

How much are we actually contacting these qualities in ourselves? They’re present, but we may not be using them to gain strength from. We can lose touch with these qualities, we don’t actually taste them; we don’t nourish ourselves, get strength from our own goodness and use that as the thing that helps wash away Mara’s forces. For most of us the tendency is to fixate on what’s going wrong. This seems to be deeply conditioned, and it’s something we need to turn around because carrying this sense of ‘wrongness’ erodes the strength of the heart.

This tendency is something I have worked with a lot over the years, just feeling what it is like when the whole body has this sense, something is going wrong. It feels kind of shaky inside, it may not take those particular words but it’s that kind of uneasy feeling. Then, just watch what happens. I notice that some of us get agitated or angry, feeling “Oh, something is going wrong!” The tendency with some people is to say “it’s out there”, “somebody out there has done something wrong”. And many of us have the tendency to feel “I must have done something wrong”. We can start making up things that we did wrong, but they are not necessarily true. It can be a deeply conditioned habit, this way of experiencing the world. Things impact the heart and rather than being just with the impact itself, the disturbance is perceived in a negative way. We take responsibility for it, blaming ourselves, blaming others. There’s no freedom in that. So the ‘night of awakening’ involves abandoning this whole paradigm, and really contacting that which is good, that which nourishes, that which has the strength to awaken. In the painting it’s dramatically portrayed but in life we can find the forces of Mara can take the form of this vague sense of ‘wrongness’, and this is what we need to awaken to. We wake up to whatever is happening.

Looking for myself, what helps me be with whatever is happening? Over the years, I find more and more that a sense of uprightness is very important, that I feel that my heart and mind are upright. The sense of living in a way that has integrity, has a sense of morality. When there is a sense of integrity it is much easier to contact and contain whatever confusion is arising. Because it’s usually arising around things that are not so seriously unskilful, we have more of a chance of containing the disturbances, understanding them and liberating them. This is *sila*. Everybody here will be living with good *sila*, that’s why we gather here, but how much do we actually appreciate it? So the Buddha would recommend that in the evening we recollect our own *sila*, recollect our own goodness, our own activities of generosity. It’s a deliberate conscious thing, where we begin to nourish our hearts through our own cultivation.

I was talking not so long ago with someone who is very active politically, going to dangerous places trying to help alleviate some of the distress in the world. They were saying how dull they feel, how eroded their heart feels. In talking it became obvious they were more in touch with what they felt they were doing *wrong* than touching into the dominant quality of their life, the skilful intentions and wholesome sacrifices. It *is* a challenge, isn’t it? Yet the real strength comes from drinking in our own goodness and being supported by the goodness of those we associate with. Then we have the possibility of waking up here and now to whatever is going on, whether we like it or not.

Recently I was reminded of something that had happened to me in India years ago on the night of Wesak when I was in Bodh Gaya sitting under the Bodhi tree. Being there at the place where the Buddha had once awakened on that same full moon night, it was fascinating to observe what was going on in my mind. We might expect the mind to be completely quiet or blissful in such a sacred place, but I was hungry because I had been fasting. I was hot because it was hot, I was cold when it got cold, I was bothered by all the hot season flies. I was feeling all that stuff passing through and thinking, “It shouldn’t be like this – here I am under the Bodhi Tree.” But then remembering: reality is here where the body gets hot, where the body gets cold, with thousands of flies walking on it – just feeling that. In this way of reflecting, we are all under the Bodhi Tree wherever we meet Mara’s forces with awareness, waking up to the truth of what is actually present. What is it like right now, as you are sitting under the Bodhi Tree? Each moment can be like this; we are sitting right here and now within this.
possibility of awakening. It’s likely to have the quality to it of all kinds of things going on, some of them frightening, some of them uplifting – it’s this mixed experience that we have to awaken to.

Ominous men

That Wesak in Bodh Gaya I had asked for permission to stay overnight in the temple grounds. The head monk had been very reluctant to let me as earlier that week an Englishwoman had been raped and murdered in those grounds. That area of India is very violent, so he didn’t think I was safe. I reiterated “I would like to sit under the Bodhi Tree,” so he finally gave me permission. Then that night as I was sitting in meditation, there were four Indian men nearby with sticks: big, ten-foot long sticks. Whenever I got up to circumambulate the temple they would follow – and their sticks would go “clunk, clunk, clunk, clunk”, all four of them. And I would feel waves of fear. Then I would sit down again and they would all sit down, watching me. It seemed that wherever I went they would follow and watch me. I spent the whole night having to work with the sense of the ominous presence of these men.

Then about five or six years later I was thinking about it and suddenly a light went off in my head and I thought: “Oh! The head monk probably asked them to make sure I was all right and to protect me.” Now, that makes sense because if I would go to the toilet they would follow me to the toilet – wherever I went these men seemed to go. The meaning I had given to them was threatening. The reality was they were probably protective. They didn’t look protective; but no-one would have come near me.

So wherever we are, as we sit in this place of awakening it’s important to notice what meaning we are giving to this stuff, all that which comes and impacts us. We can give it meanings which in most cases aren’t true and often aren’t helpful. How different it would have felt if I had sat under the Bodhi Tree on that beautiful moonlit night at the centre of the universe and thought: “Ah…four men are here protecting me.” What story are we making up and how helpful is it? Keep questioning: how are we framing reality (or non-reality, really)? What kind of game-show are we making up? What helps us come into touch with what is actually going on, so observing in terms of body, feeling, mind states and the patterns of mind? Keeping it very simple, coming into the present moment. This is really what the Buddha is exemplifying on this Night of Awakenling: someone in a mortal, limited form having the possibility to stop, be present, come into reality, stop creating boundaries of self and taste the freedom of that. We have all tasted moments of it, when we stop struggling, when things don’t have to be any other way than they are – what that feels like. The Buddha shows that this is the human possibility. We can awaken. We can awaken here and now. We can just stop creating.

Then, of course, it is a matter of what supports us in that. To nourish the mind and guard it in terms of what it contacts, guard it in terms of what it thinks and what meaning it gives to things. Myriad things are happening everywhere; what meaning am I giving? The person talking about the political work they’re doing and the things they witness, very terrible things in terms of the kinds of violence that is happening in the world. Yet it becomes a case of what meaning do they give to it. It could be one that makes for a greater feeling of disempowerment and agitation – or one that brings forth compassion and wisdom. We guard the mind in how we contact things, realizing that to awaken to something we do have to contact it. These human forms are an encouragement to come into contact, understand and release what we experience. To know what a body feels like. Know what it feels like to have feeling, to be in relationship, to be so inter-dependent.

None of it will ever feel truly comfortable: do we know that? I’m sure each one of us knows the feeling that ‘life is not happening in a way that suits me’. So we can start to try – even just internally – to manipulate it, trying to find a comfortable position in something that is uncomfortable. Where the real freedom is in being present with what it feels like, in the body, in the heart – and opening. Coming into the present moment with that Buddha quality, that quality that touches the Earth, knows the way things are, has a sense of confidence in its own goodness and integrity and can just be with whatever is happening. It doesn’t have to find a comfortable position. Doesn’t have to be holding things in terms of right and wrong.

“Are the clouds wrong?”

We were talking today about something Maechee Phatumwan, a Thai nun, said to me years back. She left me with this koan, asking: “Are the clouds wrong?” For the last decade or so I have been contemplating that. Are the clouds wrong? It was a pertinent thing to be reminded of on this cloudy day. In response, rather than not wanting them we can think “Oh, no, the clouds aren’t wrong!” – but that’s not true either. We have to come out of that whole paradigm of right and wrong, into the suchness. Things are what they are.

How do I open and receive them, what gives me the capacity to fully awaken. Even with something like that little koan “Are the clouds wrong?” we can taste how it is we frame the world in a way that increases our own suffering. This awakening of the Buddha is really an awakening out of suffering, out of the suffering of not knowing the way things are. Of wanting things to be
When we decided to mark our 25th anniversary on the same day as our Kathina festival this year, then follow it the next day with a double ordination, and then with an Elders’ Council meeting the day after that, to some it seemed we might be taking on too much. It’s true, it might have been too much. As with all such events we didn’t know how many people would come, Sangha or lay friends; we didn’t know how we would accommodate everyone, what the weather would be like, how we would cope with the parking…. Yet as Ajahn Sucitto later pointed out, goodness has a tendency to attract goodness, and I took the decision to go for it. And anyway, if I believed in the way things seemed to be, Harham Monastery probably wouldn’t be here.

I’m sure it was the same for the monastery’s founders, Nick Scott, Virginia Deaper and Richard Hopkins: without their faith, daring and commitment this sanctuary wouldn’t even have been started. The same was likewise true for Ajahn Chah. He endured the physical frustration of years of malaria fever and the apparently endless torment of mental doubts he thought would ‘make his head burst’ – not because of mere will-power or superficial certainty, but rather because of trust in the deep principles of Dhamma-vinaya (teaching and training of the Buddha) which lie behind the way things seem to be. Walking this not-easy way, such trust has the power to overcome otherwise very convincing obstructions.

As many of you will already know, soon after I arrived at Harham in 1991 we were issued with a solicitor’s notice, alleging that the land and the buildings we occupied were obtained illegally. That court case took several years to resolve and cost the monastery £70,000 to defend. Not long after that ended, I noticed that the beautiful glass engraving of the Dhammacakra that graced the east wall of the monastery had been shot out. On another occasion one of the monks was convinced the weather would go against us, that the sky would be overcast and grey and that there would be no sunshine. On another occasion one of the monks was convinced that he too had been shot at with an air rifle. Then there have been the years of difficulty trying to solve the problem of a seriously inadequate sewerage system. From time to time fellow Sangha members have suggested we should just leave the place. But even if we’d contemplated such an action (and I didn’t wish to), all of the monastery’s land is covenanted, restricting it to “monastic use only” and meaning that if we had
left, we would have left with absolutely nothing.

The way things seem to be cannot be trusted. So when Ajahn Sawaeng arranged as a 25th anniversary souvenir gift to have shoulder bags made in Thailand, we thought it would be good to have printed on them the Buddha’s words “Mindfulness overcomes all things” since it’s Right Mindfulness that enables seeing through the way things seem. Not only did these words of wisdom reflect the practice that has gone on here over the years, but they also reminded us of the way to get through a gathering that was full of uncertainty.

As it turned out the weather was fine; unseasonably mild and no wind. We planned for about 35 Sangha guests and 33 arrived. Our nearly ready new guest accommodation, Kusala Retreat House, housed 20 visitors comfortably; a mountain of food was offered by the 400 or so folk who turned up on the big day (we had guessed between 100 and 300). No problems with parking; a local farmer lent us a field. Many friends gathered together, enjoying a shared sense of commitment to something beyond personality and preference; beyond certainty and conventional security. It was a great joy.

The only evidence of our immediate neighbours on the day was the one coming to photograph for his pleasure the large banners depicting the history of the community that hung outside the front of the Dhamma Hall. He was one of many to take pictures over the three days, and as I look through some of them I see there is plenty of material for the 2008 community calendar. That is a relief, since the search for suitable images starts well in advance – several years in fact – and even then they are hard to find. For about 15 years now I’ve been putting it together and it doesn’t get any easier, so if any reader has a good suggestion about anything, including themes and images and skills, please be in touch. As is usual on Kathina days, at the completion of the ceremony we handed out the calendar for next year, this time along with various other gifts including the shoulder bag. Besides reminding people of a joyous day it’s the Buddha’s words on the bag which will encourage cultivating mindfulness. (It might also reduce the use of plastic bags. I’ve had a small campaign going since reading about a whale washing up in France with 800 kilos of them in its stomach.)

The 2007 calendar features images and words from our teacher, Venerable Ajahn Chah, this year being the 15th anniversary of his passing away. The photographs are printed on high-quality paper, in order to provide people with pictures of Ajahn Chah suitable for framing. I find the photograph and the quotation for December particularly inspiring: “Staying or going is not what matters. What matters is the mind. So all of you, please work together; cooperate and live in harmony. Let this be your legacy.” We took these words from a talk Ajahn Chah gave in the early years of Wat Nanachat, the international forest monastery he founded in Thailand. From many years of experience in leading the Sangha, Luang Por Chah knew how easy it is for young monks – and also those not so young – to become caught in outer distractions and forget inner vigilance. A commitment to individual likes and dislikes does not lead to harmony. I remember vividly that a sense of harmonious community was one of the things that struck me most when I first arrived at Wat Nanachat in rural NE Thailand in the winter of 1976: “Anything that makes it possible for twenty-one young energetic men, of nine different nationalities, to get on so well together has got to be a good thing,” I thought. The spirit of cooperative community was more attractive to me than anything I had ever seen.

On Monday, the day after our Kathina, Ajahn Sumedho needed to be off early back to Amaravati in time to catch a flight to Thailand. The spirit of harmonious and cooperative community was beautifully evident as we made arrangements for the ordination ceremony at 10 o’clock in the morning. Ajahn Abhinando had been intensely involved in much of the organizing of the previous day’s events, and he could have been forgiven if his faculties were not up to their usual crispness. However, together with Ajahn Sawaeng he conducted the demanding chanting of the ordination ceremony very smoothly.

There were two ordinands. Samanera Hiriko (‘one imbued with integrity’) from Slovenia received full acceptance into the Sangha and now begins his bhikkhu training. This requires him to live ‘in dependence’ on another bhikkhu, appointed by his preceptor Ajahn Sumedho, for the next five years. Tan Hiriko has been corresponding with me since he was sixteen. While still at high-school he attended a retreat I led in Slovenia. On the day of finishing his final exams he left home heading for Santacittarama in Italy where he eventually took anagarika precepts with Ajahn Chandapalo. He has now been here at Harnham as a samanera for nearly two years.

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Anagarika Ninoslav from Serbia, now Samanera Nyanamoli, has been with us for one year, and in receiving his initial ordination begins a year-long preparation for full acceptance as a bhikkhu.

As we sat around for breakfast on the next morning, Tuesday, we knew that at 8:45 am the Elders’ Council meeting would begin. But wonderfully, there was no evidence of anyone feeling “I would rather not”. As has become our custom these days, the senior monks and nuns had met the night before for a ‘check-in’. We have learnt from past experience that to dive into business-mode without first meeting each other as people, risks less-than-sensitive exchanges. So as we went around on Monday evening, all the sixteen participants had a chance to say where they were at and what had been happening for them since we last gathered in April. As I write this now I’m reminded of how Ajahn Chah told Ajahn Sumedho when he first came to Britain, that he should see himself as a rubbish tin available for people to deposit their suffering. I don’t think any of us feel like we are treated as rubbish tins, but it is true that we receive a lot of what others don’t know how to handle. And that carries with it a unique challenge.

It wasn’t too long ago that we saw, and felt the consequences of, seven leaders of our Western Sangha disrobing within a two year period. One of the lessons I think we have learned since then is that leaders need support. And probably the best kind of support comes from those who share the same job description. It’s embarrassing to think that we ever assumed it could be otherwise. I guess this is all part of community building. Reading in the last issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter Ajahn Amaro’s excellent review of the evolution and functioning of the Elders’ Council, one could get the impression that the entire thing was designed. But if it was designed, it wasn’t conscious and it wasn’t the design of any one individual. More likely it emerged, and what has emerged is a twice-a-year gathering of those senior Sangha members to whom the juniors go for support. And probably the best kind of support comes from those who share the same job description. It’s embarrassing to think that we ever assumed it could be otherwise. I guess this is all part of community building.

In that context, our quarter of a century on Harnham Hill doesn’t seem much, but in the immediate context of a complex, materialistic, secular society, it is significant. And so, with all our visitors now left, and the season for Kathina festivals over, our small community resumes its days usual, a meeting characterized by patience and mutual respect, imbued with a well-grounded ability to contain diversity. Personally I find these gatherings an essential source of support. Those who live in our larger communities might not feel quite the same need, but I know I am not alone in valuing them.

Concord like this does not manifest easily, and this is so especially when we remain attached to our personal opinions. One of the things that made Ajahn Chah stand out in his style of training his Western monks, was his insistence that we were treated no differently from the Thais – irrespective of our opinions about that. In some Thai monasteries Western monks were excused from chanting because they were thought to be more sincere about meditation practice. In those monasteries there was not the same emphasis on such things as memorizing the recitation of the Patimokkha rule, or learning to bow according to seniority. My firmly held-to opinion of Americans at the time (this was the 1970’s with the Vietnam War) made that sometimes difficult, until with mindful persistence I discovered that in truth my attachment to opinions – not bowing – was the source of my suffering. For Ajahn Chah there was no difference between cultivating mindfulness in these ways and in sitting meditation, or in sweeping leaves or washing the buffalo dung off the Ajahn’s feet when he returned from alms-round. It was all practice – practice in wearing down self-conceit – practice that has been going on at least as long as the two and a half thousand years of Buddhist history.

In that context, our quarter of a century on Harnham Hill doesn’t seem much, but in the immediate context of a complex, materialistic, secular society, it is significant. And so, with all our visitors now left, and the season for Kathina festivals over, our small community resumes its more usual but still mixed appearance, and continues to try and live and practise in harmony: one New Zealand monk, one Thai monk, one German monk, one Slovenian monk, one Serbian samanera, one Swedish anagarika, one Polish anagarika and two Englishmen. Sometimes we understand each other. Sometimes we don’t.

Conventional language doesn’t always flow and the differences can appear as obstructions. But in truth they are not. And it’s this truth that we are interested in. The rest is distraction. It is not the way things seem to be that matters, it is the way things are. And that way is indeed a Refuge worth celebrating.

Opposite page: photos of the occasion at Harnham
The Dhamma of Walking

Ajahn Sucitto reflects on practice while walking rough

“I DON’T THINK I CAN DO THIS.”
“I’S FANTASTIC!”

These two comments, eight hours apart, came from one of the participants in a walk I did this year in the mountains of Crete. Indicative of the struggle and the breakthrough involved when passing through previous limitations, they’re a sign of Dhamma-practice. It’s much the same on a 10-day meditation retreat, when on the third day the inspirational energy is flagging and the results of the endeavour haven’t yet made themselves apparent. That’s the practice, that’s the furthering: through meeting the edge of our limitation and mindfully working through it, we can arrive at a larger, more confident sense of our capacity.

Long-distance walking (at least five days out of the comfort zone) has a firm foundation in Buddhist contemplative practice, and as ‘tudong’ is enshrined in the Thai forest tradition. The time was when it was inevitable: to see a teacher, to travel through whole regions of Thailand meant days or weeks of walking through wilderness. And that was a salutary experience, inasmuch as a seeker had to keep strong focused motivation and “walk the talk” of commitment to the Dhamma. It meant meeting insecurity, hardship, and illness as the facts of life that they are, rather than as inconvenient hindrances to the practice. So tudong is a check-in with some of the earthier realities of life: if we haven’t come to terms with these, then where has our practice been going? What use has it been? If there are scenarios – hot baths, bodily ease – that we’ve been hanging on to, tudong is a good chance to shake them off. And that’s the meaning of ‘tudong’ – a ‘shaking off’ of attachments that build up in situations we’ve been hanging on to, tudong is a good chance to shake them off. And that’s the meaning of ‘tudong’ – a

So one prepares oneself by acknowledging that a Dhamma-walk will entail meeting one’s edge – and bearing with that until it recedes. The body is going to be like it or not and however slowly, it’s a case of just having to trudge on for as long as it takes to find a patch of flat land and a spring.

Nowadays as wilder places grow fewer and smaller and comfort zones get bigger, and as monasteries get more organized and controlled one has to seek out situations for physical challenges. (There are plenty of psychological challenges in these monasteries. Community life is a tudong in its own right.) However, sustained walking makes our practices unambiguous: this is not about performing a function, getting things done, nor is it an afternoon ramble. The ‘shaking off’ entails the reflective process of preparing oneself, pacing oneself, patiently letting one’s energy and strength build up over time, and moving beyond oneself. It also means supporting others, and being supported by them. Then there is a recognizable transformation. And in the process, one will have walked through a lot of inner chatter and mood swings, thereby strengthening the bases of dispassion and compassion.

Going alone is good, yet companionship can be a better option. Then there’s the opportunity to support, or be helped in times of need. It’s enjoyable to sense over a period of days how four or five individuals gradually form into a group in which people look out for each other – carrying another person’s gear when they’re struggling; checking to see if someone’s lagging behind and being prepared to go back and sit with someone in difficulty. Sharing stories and reflections from each others’ lives. Along with the beauty and purity of wilder places, the earthy compassion and joy of a group of walkers is a major attraction of this practice. Also to be expected are a few struggles over who is leading the group, or if not that, then how he or she is leading it – and why the dummy chose this way, and why it has to take so long, and why we have to go so fast… and so on. So it’s good to lay out the plans and perspectives in advance. After that it’s a matter of knowing when to negotiate and when to surrender – both being skillful practices – because tudong means heading into the unpredictable, into situations that don’t offer much room for negotiation. A Dhamma-walker has to consider and assess things in advance, then surrender to the circumstances that arise. As in this year’s walk, you can’t camp out on a rocky slope with no water, so like it or not and however slowly, it’s a case of just having to trudge on for as long as it takes to find a patch of flat land and a spring.

So one prepares oneself by acknowledging that a Dhamma-walk will entail meeting one’s edge – and bearing with that until it recedes. The body is going to be the main vehicle for that. One literally walks through the push and drag of mental energy into a more grounded balance. As with meditation, it begins with wise reflection: what is needed for the goal? What is excess baggage? When everything has to be carried, you can’t camp out on a rocky slope with no water, so like it or not and however slowly, it’s a case of just having to trudge on for as long as it takes to find a patch of flat land and a spring.

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So one prepares oneself by acknowledging that a Dhamma-walk will entail meeting one’s edge – and bearing with that until it recedes. The body is going to be the main vehicle for that. One literally walks through the push and drag of mental energy into a more grounded balance. As with meditation, it begins with wise reflection: what is needed for the goal? What is excess baggage? When everything has to be carried, you cut your soap in two and take a quarter-full tube of toothpaste. On a walk in the South Island of New Zealand a few years ago, no one took soap or shaving foam with them, in order to avoid polluting the pristine watershed. There was plenty of rain and mountain streams to keep us clean enough. Still, giving up the fresh feeling you get after a hot shower and a shave added to the mood of the walk. The body is part of nature; let it be so.
As for the rest of the stuff: one spare pair of socks is enough, and you can keep warm by wrapping your sleeping bag around you – and so on. That’s a wonderful exercise in renunciation in its own right. Sometimes one doesn’t even have to apply oneself: once on a long walk in India everything I had, other than the sabong (lower robe) and sandals I was wearing, got stolen. Yet we could keep walking, and it was remarkably freeing to be that empty. The miracle, obvious when you encounter it, is that we fit on this planet; and that the sign of the tudong walker always arouses faith and support in the villages one walks through, irrespective of religious beliefs. The tudong spirit, with its manifest renunciation, commitment and faith, speaks to the heart of all religions. Christians, Sikh, Muslim, whatever – they all have tudong masters in their lineages.

Pacing oneself is a good idea. It takes three or four days for the body to adjust to a more rugged regime. Getting fit in advance helps, as does taking a few preparatory day walks (with your walking gear). Then it’s good if the first day or two are relatively easy, although this isn’t always possible. You can pace yourself during the walk by setting up manageable goals for a day, and rest periods. Daily meditation, before, during and after the day’s walk provides valuable occasions both for bodily energy to be settled and soothed, and for reviewing and releasing mind-states. In this way one maintains focus and integrates the results of the practice.

Mindfulness gets a work-out in the wilds. To be attentive of the ground beneath your feet, of what kind of weather is brewing up, means you have to drop a lot of your inner chatter and pre-occupation. Rather than get embroiled in rehearsing the past, you have to look where you’re going, and look after your gear. You don’t want to get halfway along a vaguely defined trail and discover that you left your compass or map behind when you set off a little groggy in the early morning light. However, tudong isn’t just about exploring external terrain. It’s mostly about moving mindfulness into ‘outdoors’ places in the mind – like the feeling of exposure when you have no place with a door and no direction for a meal. The territory is internal. Like many other monks and nuns, I have done tudongs in the soft green landscapes of Britain and Ireland, where a main theme of the practice is that of making oneself available for alms-food and shelter. Out on a village street, feeling like a freak and wondering if anyone could possibly guess that you’re in need of food, let alone be inclined to respond to that need, there’s a fundamental boundary to cross: that of one’s nervousness of strangers, or awkwardness about being exposed and vulnerable. Yet some of our Sangha have done tudongs of one to three months in that territory. It can be a purification of anxiety, and also of the subtle conceit of independence that we can still carry after years of monastic life. We can take the requisites for granted. Tudong blows that piece of self away. The result is greater humility and also greater faith. And by making these principles manifest, one provides a teaching for others: one of the samaneras at Cittaviveka first took up the training as a result of meeting two nuns on tudong in Wales.

There is also the practice with hardship: whether that means days of walking in heavy rain, and blistered feet, or hours of grinding slowly up a mountain. Then no matter whom you’re with, you’re on your own with your mind’s relationship to the body and its pain. And this means another skilful surrender, the surrender to bodily life. It’s something that we can avoid for years with our soft chairs and central heating – until disease or death comes to wake us up. ‘Best to prepare yourself’ say the wise. A tudong often enables one to witness the resistances of the mind to discomfort, fatigue and pain, and mindfully walk through them. The simplicity of the practice means coming back into the body again and again: this apparently uncomfortable place is also a place which doesn’t agonize over how much longer this is going to take, fantasize over where else it could be or have an opinion about oneself or others. It just walks. And eventually the mind surrenders and just walks with it. Then in this very body, rather than in the village in the distance or in the sleeping bag at the end of the day, is where the mind leaves its suffering behind. A key truth comes home, one that is well worth travelling for: to mindfully open to suffering, a step at a time, is the way to accomplish peace. Walking, standing, sitting or reclining, to live in that truth is a practitioner’s Path.
Monasteries
Checking-in with some of the monasteries at the end of another year

Amaravati

Amaravati Monks
2006 has seen, as ever, a number of comings and goings within the still and steady vessel of Sangha life at Amaravati. Mostly this year it seemed to be arrivals. Ven. Vinitha, already a novice for 12 years in his native Sri Lanka, joined us early in the year, taking upasampada with Luang Por Sumedho before the vassa. Joining him was Samanera – now Bhikkhu – Dhammiko, one of a steadily growing group of Portuguese practitioners taking interest in joining the monastic community here. His compatriot Anagarika Vasco will have taken pabbajja as a samanera in December along with Anagarika Nicola, from Switzerland. Bruno, also from Portugal, joined Adin from California in taking anagarika precepts in July. Ven. Dhammiko will be going to practise at Cittaviveka during 2007, making room for another Portuguese monk, Ven. Kancano, who will join us from Thailand. Two Dominics, both English, will have also taken ordination by the New Year: Anagarika Dominic became Samanera Adicco in May and the newest Dominic will take anagarika precepts in December.

This year sixteen bhikkhus, three samaneras and five anagarikas spent the vassa at Amaravati, filling up the accommodation for male Sangha and necessitating a waiting list for bhikkhus asking to join us. Three bhikkhus just slipping in the door this year have included myself, returning from an extended period in Thailand and elsewhere to Amaravati having started here as an anagarika in 1989; Ven. Ahimsako, a junior American monk visiting from Abhayagiri to train with us for a year and who is also returning, in the sense that he lived in England for 17 years before his ordination in America, much of that time coming to Amaravati as a lay supporter; and Ven. Panyanando, an English monk of nine vassas originally ordained in Cambodia and who trained for eight years at Wat Pah Nanachat and other Ajahn Chah branch monasteries in Thailand before arriving in the UK last summer, spending the vassa at Hartridge and arriving at Amaravati for our Kathina.

As to exits, besides Ven. Dhammiko’s move to Cittaviveka, Samanera Paramito will be travelling to Thunder Bay, Canada, for a year to train with Ajahn Punnadhammo at Arrow River Forest Hermitage (www.arrowriver.ca). And Anagarika Gabor, having completed his year’s training, will be returning to lay life in Hungary with the heartfelt blessings of all of us, grateful for all he’s given and shared.

– Bhikkhu Jayanto, on behalf of the monks.

Amaravati Nuns
There has been a good feeling in the nuns’ community at Amaravati over the past year, even with many changes.
Significant people have been away – Ajahn Candasi in Edinburgh supporting her family, and Sister Bodhipala in Cambodia for the vassa – but there is also a tangible sense of the whole and of remaining connected. The question of how we support the Dhamma and ourselves as women practitioners has been very much in consciousness. On her return from Cambodia Sister Bodhipala gave her first Dhamma talk, including her experience of the difficult position of women in traditional Buddhism. At Amaravati itself we are now exploring what forms of leadership and organization may work for us as women. Thus since July the women’s community has been led cooperatively; Ajahn Upekkha as acting senior nun serving together with both Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Metta (who celebrates her tenth vassa this year!).

Alongside this kind of innovation we have been strengthening some of the traditional building blocks of this life such as going on regular pindapat (faith alms-round). This has been heartening for all of us involved. There have also been people entering the training: Sr Chandasara (ex Anagarika Louise) taking the Ten Precepts in May and Anagarikas Doris, Chiara and Miriam joining us more recently. In December two more lay women, Soledad and Ana Sophia, will take the Anagarika precepts. We are preparing ourselves now to enter the winter retreat and would like to express our deep gratitude to all the lay supporters for your great generosity, helping us to continue our spiritual journey with ease, joy and well being.

Submitted by Sister Sumedha, on behalf of the Amaravati Nuns’ community.

Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham)

With our 25th anniversary celebrations over, our small community here on the hill recently hunkered down out of the wind for a week of silence. It has been a busy autumn. And with the turning of the clocks and the arrival of dark afternoons and moonlit mornings, it was a chance to turn inward and gather our energies for two more active months before the start of the Winter Retreat. Traditionally, we have many friends visiting our monastery in the time leading up to Christmas and New Year. Some of them this year will be able to stay in the new Retreat House which now has various finished rooms ready to serve as very agreeable guest accommodation. The Winter Retreat this time ‘round is going to be for a small bunch that are left on the hill, as Ajahn Munindo, Hiriko Bhikkhu and our caretaker Richard all head east. Together, they’ll visit Wat Pah Pong for the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of Ajahn Chah’s passing away. Afterwards, Hiriko Bhikkhu remains in Thailand at Wat Marp Jun for several months of traditional practice under the watchful eye of Ajahn Anan, whilst Ajahn Munindo and Richard head to New Zealand. Back in Britain, Samanera Nyanamoli will spend the Winter Retreat at Chithurst, leaving Ajahn Sawaeng, Ajahn Abhinando, Anagarika Radek and kitchen manager Jim to hold fort in Northumberland. Then in March, the monastery will close down for a month to allow for the installation of our new sewage system. That means the two Ajahns will leave for Santacittarama and Dhammadala respectively, that Jim temporarily skedaddles and that Radek – our sturdy Pole – will be left to bathe out of a modest bucket. All being well, as the days lengthen in April and everyone returns, the process of ablutions will be less stressful and we will have a fully-functioning retreat house to which all are welcome.

Hartridge (Devon)

In this piece from the Hartridge newsletter, Ajahn Suriyo writes of the transition happening there:

After three and a half years in residence I have decided to step down as abbot of Hartridge and spend a year or two on personal retreat. It has been a privilege to participate in the renewal and ongoing evolution of Hartridge, and even more than the quiet Blackdown Hills I will miss the sincere and generous lay-supporters who keep this monastery going. At the last Elders’ Council meeting in October we discussed the next step for Hartridge. To our delight Ajahn Jutindharo, who was once an anagarika here and has spent the last twelve years at Amaravati Monastery, has expressed an interest in coming to Hartridge as the next senior monk. It will take him a few months to extricate himself from his responsibilities at Amaravati, and in the meantime Ven. Dhiravamso, who has been in residence for the Vassa, will act as caretaker. Ven. Dhammarakkho from Chithurst Monastery will join him for the winter retreat. Ven. Panyanando, also here this past vassa, has taken up residence at Amaravati. May Hartridge continue to flourish and act as a beacon of peace in a turbulent world.
At Cittaviveka, life goes on much as usual, though with an increased community of monks and nuns, and both Ajahn Sucitto and Ajahn Karuniko in residence after long spells away. The biggest change has been the acquisition of Hammerwood Cottage, which has been renamed Rocana Vihara and is being used to increase the accommodation for nuns and female anagarikas. Julia Wilkinson, a long-term supporter and trustee of the English Sangha Trust who has been involved with the purchase of the cottage, reports on the current situation on behalf of the Trust:

**Rocana Vihara Update**

It is more than nine months now since the nuns moved into the Rocana Vihara on the third of January this year. This house, previously named Hammer Cottage, is adjacent to the smaller, existing nuns’ cottage, Aloka, and the Hammer Wood so provides a very appropriate home for the nuns. Already, significant movement and changes have been taking place.

Firstly there has been an increase in Sangha numbers, with nine to ten nuns and female anagarikas now living in both the new four-bedroom cottage and the kutis. This has meant that Aloka has been able to provide more accommodation for female lay guests. Indeed, there has been a steady stream (at times a flood) of visitors and the nuns’ community are pleased to be able to offer a more suitable place for old and new friends to stay.

The nuns are greatly benefiting in other ways from having these improved facilities with better space for living and practice. The Rocana Vihara now provides a hub around which the nuns can organize their lives within the larger Chithurst community. Though receiving their main meal at Chithurst House, they are not, as before, having to be constantly moving up and down the hill between the two locations. The monks continue to be extremely supportive of the project, offering much help, and the nuns continue to be involved in the day-to-day affairs of Chithurst.

The purchase of the Rocana Vihara also means that all the land on both sides of the valley leading up to the lake and the forest is now in the ownership of the English Sangha Trust. The new cottage comes with more than two acres of garden and woodland, so that the whole area is available for quiet contemplation. In particular this enhances the environment around Aloka and also around the south-west corner of the lake.

When the cottage was surveyed prior to purchase it was pointed out that fairly urgent repairs were needed to part of the north-facing roof and the supporting timbers. This is currently being undertaken by contractors and completion of the tiling is awaited. There are some other less significant repairs required but otherwise the cottage is warm, dry and in good order.

With regard to the finances, the EST is extremely grateful to the very generous donors who have contributed so far. Many people have asked how this is going, so here is a breakdown of the main costs, payments and contributions to date:

**Costs**
- Purchase price of cottage and land (plus necessary repairs): £785,000

**Payments**
- Deposit paid by EST: £100,000
- Repairs funded by donations: £10,000
- Loan from Triodos bank: £675,000

**Total:** £785,000

**Fund balance** (further donations less mortgage repayments) at 30.9.06: £191,000

It can be seen from this that it will be possible to pay off a significant part of the loan, in the order of £150,000 to £175,000, by the end of the year. This would then reduce the loan capital outstanding at the year end to around £500,000.

The trustees have been very encouraged by the level of support so far. We are delighted that the cottage has immediately made such a big difference to the Sangha, both in the significant increase in the number of women able to practise in this situation and also the improved accommodation and environment. Benefits extend to the whole Chithurst Sangha.
There is still quite a way to go to pay off the loan so we very much hope that the excellent support for this project will continue. Many grateful thanks to all of you who have helped in whatever way, or will do so in the future.

The nuns are planning another Open Day (to be announced in the next newsletter) when all are welcome to visit.

Julia Wilkinson
(EST Trustee)

Santacittarama (Italy)

Nine years ago Santacittarama relocated to its present setting in the Sabina hills north of Rome, an attractive property with several buildings and 25 acres of woodland and meadow at the end of a gravel road. Ajahn Chandapalo (British), Ajahn Jutindharo (Thai) and Ven. Mahapanyo (Italian) are long-term residents, giving the monastery stability and continuity and covering the most useful languages. Other monks have come and gone over the years; at present there is Ajahn Uttamo, of Taiwanese nationality and nearly 20 years experience of monastic life in Thailand, and another Thai monk called Ajahn Suvaco. Samanera Brahmano, an Italian novice, has gone to Chithurst for the winter retreat and we expect him back in the spring. One indicator of how well-established Santacittarama has become is the fact that we’ve had no anagarika since June and it’s hardly been noticed. There always seem to be enough willing lay guests helping out, taking initiative and able to get on with whatever needs to be done.

People come from all over Italy and beyond to spend a few days or more joining in the daily routine. Since April we’ve been able to offer more comfortable accommodation for women, having completed a project to convert an old outbuilding, and next year plan to improve and expand the male guest quarters. The main limitation here, however, is the lack of a large meeting hall and plans are beginning to take shape for a temple building. It seems that the local council is well-disposed and we are about to set forth on the procedure that we hope will result in obtaining the necessary permits. Italian bureaucracy can be quite an adventure! The lie of the land lends itself to a square structure of two levels. It will have a pyramid-shaped roof, somewhat similar to Amaravati’s temple, with a large meeting hall upstairs of around 200 square metres floor space, and a lower level with reception room, library, bathrooms, storage and an apartment for visiting monks. A detailed plan is still being worked on. In the meantime we’ll continue to make do with the small shrine room and, for larger gatherings, a big tent that is barely withstanding the ravages of time, but when the weather is fine affords a pleasant space for ceremonies, meditation days and large danas.

Being situated near the capital city means that often we find ourselves representing Buddhists at the national level. One such recent event was the Remembrance Day service at Rome’s Commonwealth War Cemetery. In the past we’ve been involved in interfaith gatherings in the Italian parliament, at St. Peters in Rome, as well as in Rieti and Assisi. We also have a good connection with several embassies, especially the Thai embassy that has always been very supportive and where we are regularly invited.

One of the most rewarding aspects of living in Italy is the warmth and sincere interest of the local people. Just a few miles down the valley lies the ancient abbey of Farfa, where part of the film “Name of the Rose” was shot, home to a small community of Benedictine monks, one of whom has become a dear friend. Don Santo, a Sicilian, is a regular and much appreciated visitor, sometimes coming to join us for tea and a chat or for an hour of meditation during retreat time. It is also encouraging to see the number of young people coming to join in, motivated to investigate the teachings of the Buddha and to apply themselves to meditation practice. Among the lay people there’s a good balance between the Asians – mostly Thai and Sri Lankan – and Italians, and a wholesome atmosphere of appreciation and collaboration between them.

The monastery website (www.santacittarama.org) is regularly updated and now has a gallery of photos.
Dhammapala (Switzerland)

Ajahn Khemasiri, who took up the reins at Dhammapala after Ajahn Tiradhammo moved to Bodhinyanarama in New Zealand last year, invites anyone interested to write to them in Switzerland (address on the back page) and they will be happy to post you a copy of the English language version of their newsletter which will include news from this past year.

Bodhinyanarama (New Zealand)

Ajahn Dhammanando writes from Wellington:

Last year we were joined by Ajahn Ariyasilo who has generously contributed both to teaching here and at the various groups, and to helping with a number of maintenance projects. In February, Venerable Varapanyo took Upasampada here in a ceremony officiated over by Ajahn Brahmavamso, the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Perth, Australia. In April Venerable Dhammado, who was originally trained in New Zealand, returned to Bodhinyanarama from Abhayagiri Monastery in California, where he has been resident for the last four years. This Vassa saw six monks in residence here: Ajahn Tiradhammo, Ajahn Ariyasilo, Bhante Jinalankara, Ajahn Sucinno, Ven. Dhammado and Ven. Varapanyo plus Anagarika Dan. Venerable Dhammanando spent the Rains Retreat as monk in residence at the Buddhist Society of Victoria in Melbourne, later returning here in October. Sister Medhanandi is currently on pilgrimage in Asia.

In addition to the teaching some of our bhikkhus have offered in Australia, this year our monastic community has continued reconnecting with meditation groups around New Zealand. There are regular visits to Palmerston North and New Plymouth, coupled with occasional visits to Auckland, Christchurch, Nelson, Napier and, of course, within Wellington itself. Bhante Jinalankara has taught retreats in Otaki and Dunedin. The monastery teaching programme has been expanded so that each month we not only offer an ‘Introduction to Meditation’ evening, as well as a Saturday afternoon meditation workshop, but also regular weekly meetings, sutta classes and Bhante Jinalankara’s retreats in Sinhalese. In October, Ajahn Tiradhammo taught the first weekend retreat in English and we intend to offer more next year. There will also be a New Year’s retreat taught by Ajahn Tiradhammo.

Many physical improvements to buildings have been undertaken, including the Upper House plus rear patio and the Triplex (guest residence), and there are further plans in the pipeline. Eventually we hope to have a new kitchen area. This autumn Ajahn Sucinno and Ven. Dhammado each disrobed; ex Dhammado has now returned as Peter Fernando, to live in the community as a resident upasaka, while Ajahn Sucinno has returned to the lay life. We wish them both well for the future.

Abhayagiri (California)

Nyaniko Bhikkhu writes on behalf of the Sangha at Abhayagiri:

In June 2005 I left Abhayagiri for a year-long stay in Thailand. On the day of my departure, large earth-moving machines were breaking ground on what was to become the monastery’s new cloister buildings. These include an office building with three rooms, public restrooms, and a disabled guest room. When I returned in June 2006, the buildings were completed. Just before returning from Thailand I spoke with Tan Karunadhammo on the phone and he let me know that “There’s
plenty of work for you to take part in here when you get back. We’re building four new kutis, a solar system.”

A few days after returning to America, in addition to the new cloister buildings, there were two newly framed Elders’ cabins and two kutis made to a smaller standard size of 10' x 14'. The community was also preparing to set sixty solar panels on top of the Dhamma Hall and main house. The solar project was also to have a second phase with 18 more panels up in the forest. Most of the building work this year has focused on these projects. The solar system in the forest will provide electricity for all of the new kutis, and the future Dhamma Hall and monks’ utility building.

January of 2006 saw record rains and mudslides. The most damage occurred at the women’s guest house, where the hillside and garden collapsed. So, the hillside was reconstructed and covered in large rocks. Near the end of 2006 when the rainy season came again, the exposed sections of hillside were covered with coconut husk cloth and erosion-control grass.

In April, Bhante Rahula paid us a one-week visit and taught four-stage yogic breathing for bringing up energy. Sister Ajahn Candasiri visited from Amaravati for one week in May, accompanied by Sister Cittapala.

Ajahn Pasanno has been on retreat in Thailand this year, leaving Ajahn Amaro as the solitary abbot. Also this year Abhayagiri turned ten years old. Ajahn Chandako and Ajahn Visuddhi joined us for the tenth anniversary celebration in June. On June 4th an open house was held and the lay stewards formally offered the keys to the new cloister buildings to the Sangha. A slide show presentation was given, showing the monastery’s transformations over the past ten years. In late June, Tan Ahimsa went to England to spend his third year as a bhikkhu at Amaravati, and possibly spend some time at the other English branch monasteries.

Also in late June Ajahn Prateep returned to Thailand to attend to his mother who was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Due to a viral infection during the operations she died, and Ajahn is now staying in Thailand for at least one year so that his religious visa can be renewed. Several highly respected Ajahns including Ajahn Dtun, Ajahn Anan, and Ajahn Jayasaro, plus about thirty bhikkhus attended the funeral for Ajahn Prateep’s mother. We are uncertain as to when Ajahn Prateep will return to Abhayagiri.

Tan Dhirapannyo came to live at Abhayagiri from July until late November. He was our Vinaya teacher during the vassa, and we greatly appreciated the depth of his learning and the detail with which he covered the training rules. Tan Dhirapannyo has now returned to his native Thailand, to live at an Ajahn Chah branch monastery in Ubon.

Bhante Gunaratana visited in early November. Bhante’s presence and mastery as a Dhamma teacher was deeply refreshing. Bhante gave a talk on merit one Saturday night at the monastery, which began as follows: “All of the devatas have left the United States, so we must invite them back.” We hope to invite Bhante Gunaratana back many times in the future.

Sister Ajahn Thaniya paid us a visit in November for one week before helping Ajahn Amaro lead the annual thanksgiving retreat.

Tan Dhammadaso moved to the New Zealand monastery, Bodhinyanarama, in April 2006. His health has steadily degenerated over the past five years, and he felt that it was extremely difficult to continue living as a bhikkhu given his extreme physical circumstances. Tan Dhammadaso returned to the lay life after the Kathina ceremony this year. Tan Satimanto and Tan Phasuko have also returned to the lay life.

SANGHA
From early January, our monastic communities will be in retreat, most of them until the end of March. During this time overnight accommodation will not be available for guests. Visitors may still come during the day to meditate or to help with mealtime offerings. If you would like to offer dana, it is helpful to let the kitchen manager know beforehand by phoning the monastery. At Amaravati, a Dhamma talk is usually given on Observance nights; at Cittaviveka, on Saturday nights. The Saturday afternoon meditation workshops will continue at Amaravati. Telephone messages will be processed regularly throughout this time, but in general, written enquiries will not be attended to until late March.

AMARAVATI
Amaravati Temple heating
As any of you who have visited Amaravati during the winter months over the last year or two will know, the heating in the Temple has not been working properly and the Temple has been cold. Unfortunately, because the problem is in the stone floor, repair is not going to be easy, quick or cheap. Starting in the New Year the Temple building will be closed – for up to several months – to enable the heating system to be replaced. For more information about the replacement project please visit the news section of our website: www.amaravati.org/abmsnew/index.php/News

Website – www.amaravati.org
Amaravati’s website has been gradually evolving since being redesigned earlier this year. Plans to include the slideshow of images and commentary from Ajahn Sumedho’s life mentioned in the last issue of this newsletter have not been abandoned, yet are now uncertain due to technical considerations.

Online donations: The new website has a facility for making donations online. This can be accessed by selecting: Participate/ Support Monastery/Donate from the drop down menu. Then select online donations. – the Treasurer

Family events
Booking forms and further information can be downloaded from: www.familly.amaravati.org

Rainbows Weekend: May 25–27th
Family Camp Weekend: June 22–24th
Family Summer Camp: August 18–27th

For booking information for these events contact: Tim Hagyard, 103 Tamworth Road, Hertford SG13 7DN
e-mail: tim.hagyard at ntlworld dot com
telephone: 01992 302643

Young Persons Retreat: October 5–7th
Creative Weekend: Dec. 14–16th

Amaravati lay events 2007
Organized by the Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association

These events provide an opportunity to practise together and explore themes relevant to daily life. They include silent and guided meditation, yoga, discussion and study groups, and other activities. Events are led by experienced lay-teachers. All are welcome. Our theme for 2007 is the ‘Perfections’ (Paramis), to be perfected by one intent on enlightenment.

Days of Practice – no need to book
5:30 pm Fri. – 4 pm on the last day.

Retreats – advanced booking essential
May 18–20th – Retreat: Wisdom & Effort
June 2nd – Lay Ministry Day
July 6–10th – Five-day Retreat: “Living Daily Life as an Opening for Reflection”

Sat Jan 13th – Winter Day of Practice: Giving
Sat Feb 10th – Winter Day of Practice: Virtue
Sat Mar 10th – Winter Day of Practice: Renunciation
Sat May 18th – Lay Ministry Day
Sat Aug 11th – Day of Practice: Patience
Sat Nov 10th – Day of Practice: Kindness
Sat Dec 1st – Day of Practice: Equanimitiy

PLEASE CHECK FOR LATE PROGRAMME CHANGES ON OUR WEBSITE: www.buddhacommunity.org

Retreat booking forms may be downloaded from there.

CITTAVIVEKA
Website – www.cittaviveka.org
Cittaviveka now has a website – please have a look!

HARTRIDGE
Ajahn Suriyo stepping down
After three and a half years in residence Ajahn Suriyo is stepping down as abbot of Hartridge to spend a year or two on personal retreat. Ajahn Jutindharo has expressed an interest in going to Hartridge as the next senior monk, and is likely to arrive in May. In the meantime Ven. Dhiravamso will act as caretaker. Ven. Dhammarakko from Chithurst Monastery will join him for the winter retreat.

2007 Winter Retreat dates:
January 4th – March 30th

Meditation Workshops:
Saturday March 31st
Saturday April 28th

SANGHA WALKS 2007
Organized by Nick Scott

Walking-Retreat in Crete with Ajahn Sucitto
One week: May 1–8th

We will be staying in a mountain hut (with Spartan conditions) and alternating days of sitting meditation with long day-walks in the mountains

Limited to 8 men and 8 women. You must be reasonably fit (the walking will not be easy!) and have attended at least one ten day retreat in this tradition.

Walking-Retreat in Slovakia with Ajahn Vajiro*
Ten days: June 29th – July 8th

We will be walking through the wooded Low Tatras of Slovakia and then climb into the High Tatras mountains finishing across the border in Poland.

Limited to 8 men. You must be reasonably fit, have a head for heights, supply your own equipment and have done previous meditation retreats.

* If Ajahn Vajiro is unable to participate, another experienced monk will go in his place.

Costs: Participants pay their own costs and contribute to the cost of organization as well as support of the monks. For more information contact me at: Nickscott at amaravati dot org

Sangha walks in Norway
Organized by Luke Hindmarch:
Time period: late June and July

Any laywomen wishing to do a ten-day walk across high moorland in Norway with Ajahn Anandabodhi and/or other nuns, and any laymen interested in doing a separate, similar walk with Ajahn Rattanawanno and another monk, please visit this website for more information: http://uk.msnusers.com/sanghawalks
Or send an e-mail to: sanghawalks at hotline dot com

Rude Awakenings
About fifteen years ago Ajahn Sucitto and Nick Scott undertook a six-month walking pilgrimage in India, partial accounts of which have appeared over the years in selected snippets in the Forest Sangha Newsletter. Readers may be interested to know that the full story has now been published by Wisdom Publications, under the title Rude Awakenings.
Contacts and Practice Venues

**England**

- **Bath**: Bill & Carol Huxley (01225) 314 500
- **Bedford**: David Stubbs (01234) 720 892
- **Berkshire**: Anthea West (0118) 979 8101
- **Brighton**: Nimmala (01273) 723 378
  Sam Halter (0788) 882 1525
- **Cambridge**: Dan Jones (01223) 246 257
- **Canterbury**: Charles Watters (01227) 463 342
- **Carlisle**: Jean Nelson (01228) 543491

**Hemel Hempstead Bodhinyana Group:**
- **Chris Ward** (01442) 890034
- **Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside:**
  - Sumedha (01539) 729 793
- **Leeds Area**: Daniela Loeb (0113) 279 1375
  Anne Grimsihaw (01274) 691 447
- **Liverpool**: Ursula Haekel (0151) 427 6668
- **London Hampstead**: 1 Hillside (Rm. 6)
  - Caroline Randall (020) 8348 0537
  - Ann Booth (020) 7485 0505
- **London Buddhist Society**,
  - 58 Eccleston Square, London SW1 (020) 7834 5858
- **London-Noting Hill**: Jeffery Craig (0207) 221 9330
- **Leigh-on-sea**: Rob Howell (01702) 482 134
- **Midhurst**: Barry Durrant (01730) 821 479
  - Vivian Bell (01730) 812 362
- **Newcastle**: Ian Plagaro-Neill (0191) 469 2778
- **Newent-Gloucs.**: John Teire (01531) 821 902
  - e-mail: john.teire@virgin.net
- **Norwich**: Robbert Coggan (01953) 451 741
- **Penzance**: Lee (01736) 762 135
- **Portsmouth**: Medhavi (02392) 732 280
- **Redruth**: Vanessa (01209) 214 031
- **Sheffield**: Greed Bradshaw (0114) 262 1559
  - e-mail: greg.bradshaw@btclck dot com
- **South Dorset**: Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati) (01305) 786 821
- **Southampton**: Ivor Minard (023) 8089 4890
- **Steyning, Sussex**: Jayanti (01903) 812 130
- **Stroud**: John Groves (07967) 777 742
- **Surrey-Woking**: Rocana (01483) 761 398
- **Taunton**: Annie Fisher (01278) 457245
- **Teesside**: John Doyle (01642) 587 274
- **Totnes**: James Whelan (01803) 865 667

**Outside England**

- **Co. Clare, Ireland:** Sunyata Centre
  - (00353) 613-67073
- **Cork, Ireland**: Paddy Boyle (00353)214-622964
- **Dublin**: Rupert Westrup (01) 280 2832
- **Edinburgh**: Neil Howell (0131) 226 5044
- **Glasgow**: James Scott (0141) 637 9731
- **Machynlleth, Wales**: Angela Llewellyn (01650) 511350
- **Pembrokehire, S. Wales**:
  - Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson (01239) 820 79

### Amaravati Retreats

**Retreat Schedule 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>13–17 April</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Vimalo*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>20–22 April</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Karuniko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>27–29 April</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Anandabodhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>4–13 May</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Vajiro</td>
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<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>8–17 June</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Thanasanti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>29–1 July</td>
<td>Thai Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Ratanaawanno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>13–17 July</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Sundara</td>
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<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>28 July–9 Aug.</td>
<td>13 Days</td>
<td>Luang Por Sumedho**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>7–16 September</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Luang Por Sumedho**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R10</td>
<td>28–30 September</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Candasiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11</td>
<td>12–14 October</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Jayanto</td>
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<tr>
<td>R12</td>
<td>19–21 October</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Metta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R13</td>
<td>2–6 November</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Nyanarato</td>
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<tr>
<td>R14</td>
<td>16–25 November</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Sucitto**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R15</td>
<td>7–9 December</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Anandabodhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R16</td>
<td>27–1 Jan 2008</td>
<td>6 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Upekkha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Fully booked for women; ** Fully booked.

(Applicants for retreats that are fully booked will be placed on a waiting list.)

**General Guidelines**

All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat. Due to demand, people may join no more than three retreats a year. The Retreat Centre is dependent on donations alone to meet its running costs.

**Booking Procedure**

Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form, which can be obtained by:

- Downloading from the website
- E-mailing the Retreat Centre
- Writing to the Retreat Centre.

Then either post or e-mail the completed booking form. Please note that bookings cannot be made over the telephone.

**Start and Finish Times**

Registration is from 4 pm to 7 pm on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 7:15 pm. Weekend retreats end at 4 pm; longer retreats end at lunchtime.

**Contact Information**

Retreat Manager, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP13BZ UK
A stamped addressed envelope would be appreciated.

Retreat Centre tel. no.: (0144) 284-3239

E-mail: retreats@amaravati dot org
Website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org

**Ajahn Candasiri**

will teach a 7 Day Retreat in the Czech Republic at Josefov Dul in the Jizerske Mountains

7th – 14th July, 2007

Contact: Buddha Mangala, Ms. Jitka Haskova, Churanovska 5/2694, 150 00 Praha 5, Czech Republic
E-mail: mangala@buddha.cz

Recommended donation to cover accommodation and food for the week is 95 Euros
These days are traditionally given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome: contact the individual monasteries for specifics, as routines vary.

Moon Phase
- FULL: 3 (Wed) 11 (Thu)
- HALF: 2 (Fri) 10 (Sat) 16 (Fri) 24 (Sat)
- NEW: 3 (Sat) 11 (Sun) 18 (Sun) 26 (Mon)
- HALFB: 2 (Mon) 10 (Tue) 16 (Mon) 24 (Tue)

Magha Puja

ASSOCIATED MONASTERIES

BRITAIN
- Amaravati Monastery
  St Margaret’s, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ
  Tel: Office: (0144) 284-2455
  Retreat Info: (*) 284-3239
  Fax: (0144) 284-3721
  www.amaravati.org
  Stewards: English Sangha Trust
- control of the Forest Sangha Newsletter is handled by Abhayagiri Monastery: please contact them directly to be put on the N. American mailing list.

AUSTRALIA
- Bodhinyana Monastery
  216 Kingsbury Drive, Serpentine 6125 WA
  Tel: (08) 95 252 420
  Fax: (08) 95 253 420
- Bodhivamya Monastery
  780 Woods Point Road, East Warburton, Victoria. 3799
  Tel: +61 (0) 359 665 999
  Fax: +61 (0) 359 665 998
- Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre (Perth)
  18–20 Narson Way, Nollamara 6061 WA
  Tel: (08) 9345-1711
  Fax: (08) 9344-4220
  www.bsww.org.au
  Stewards: Buddha Society of Western Australia
- Santi Forest Monastery
  Lot 6 Coalmines Road, PO Box 132 Bundanoon, 2578 NSW
  Tel: +61 (02) 4883 6331
  Fax:+64 (02) 8572 8286
  website: http://santi.m3k.googlespages.com
  e-mail: santioffice at gmail dot com

NEW ZEALAND
- Bodhinyanarama
  17 Rakau Grove, Stokes Valley, Wellington, 6008
  Tel: (+64) 45 637-193
  Fax: (+64) 45 635-125
  www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
  e-mail: sangha at actrix.gen dot nz
  Stewards: Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association
- Vimutti Monastery
  PO Box 7
  Bombay 2343
  +64 (0)9 236 6816
  e-mail: vimutti.atba at gmail dot com
  www.vimutti.org.nz
  Stewards: Auckland Theravada Buddhist Association