“In our modern world we want to see results as quickly as possible. There is constant pressure to keep up with the latest advances, together with a fear of being left behind.

“We rush into getting results. But what happens to us when we do that? What happens to us, to ourselves? These questions should be considered when we sincerely look for peace.

“In this context, patience is one of the key qualities that we need to recognize more consciously. Often, we see patience as old-fashioned; it looks the opposite of keeping pace with the world. But if we are to find a way to live together peacefully, the virtue of patience is essential.

“How are we when we are patient? How is the state of the body, the mind? Is it simply negative – or passive? Or is it the moment of being nourished, the moment of regaining our strength?

“The moment we are patient we gain inner strength and, more importantly, it leads us to realize that very moment is complete in itself. Nothing is missing.

“The second we start wanting something to be over, the moment our minds start pushing towards whatever we think is coming next, we lose the immediacy of the present moment.

“It is impatience that takes us away from what is happening now. On the other hand, it is patience that keeps us in the here and now, attending to each and every moment of our lives.”

Ajahn Nyanarato
Spring is here in Hertfordshire. It is evidenced by the fact that despite a raging hailstorm weirdly pelting the greenness this afternoon in a sudden white freeze, daffodils, birdsong and buzzing things are still present – determined like most of us to have their bit of being.

Of course, remembering that we too shall pass is not always easy, and it can be heartbreaking to see those we love die. Many of us here and around the world will wish to remember and lovingly acknowledge the goodness of two lives recently past: Ven. Dr Vajiragnana and Ven. Maha Ghosananda, greatly respected elder monks, Sri Lankan and Cambodian respectively. Almost identical in age and seniority, they each had meaningful contact with our community over the years in various ways – particularly Dr Vajiragnana. For all the appreciation many of us feel for their lives, it isn’t possible here to provide more than brief acknowledgements. Ajahn Candasiri and Ven. Panyanando have kindly offered obituaries.

This issue of the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* began with an interview with Sr. Bodhipala, an extraordinary person who is now a nun at Amaravati, practising diligently after a long life of service in the private and public spheres. As it turned out, the resulting huge transcript was too much to process for this issue once the other articles had come together, and her sudden journey to Vietnam a few weeks ago to be present for her mother’s death means there may be more of her reflections to incorporate in what will now be a future article.

Sr. Bodhipala’s inclusion would certainly have fit in with the rest of this issue. Having also interviewed Ajahn Nyanarato (in *Place to no place*) in the hope of introducing to *FSN* readers a taste of his wise and lovely presence, I received an article from Ajahn Piyasilo, a friend from Thailand spending a year at Cittaviveka, from whom I’d been asking for something for the newsletter. Ven. Piyasilo is a skilled writer in his native Thai language, and has been careful to learn English well. Yet he’s also proven skilled at quickly making the considerable adaptations required in coming from Thai to Western community life with few if any hiccups. In *When East meets West* he shares some of his observations concerning these cultural differences after having spent about six months at Chithurst.

April’s *FSN* seemed to have its theme: members of our monastic community living in England yet originally coming from Buddhist countries. Noticing this, and with – originally – Cambodia (Sr. Bodhipala), Japan (Ajahn Nyanarato) and Thailand (Ajahn Piyasilo) represented – and though initially I had no intention of organizing it this way – I thought of Sri Lanka since we have Bhikkhu Vinueetha here in the community as well. I invited him to share something of his life and experience coming from there to here, and he does so in a heart-warming way in *Berries, hermits, and undreamed dreams*.

There are unseen threads weaving together here as well. It’s a coincidence that after hearing so much about Cambodia and the influence on her life of Ven. Maha Ghosananda from Sr. Bodhipala, his presence is felt in this issue even though her own inclusion has been postponed. Even more interestingly for me, I’m aware that Ajahn Piyasilo became a monk in the “quiet place on the Laotian border” mentioned in Ajahn Nyanarato’s article when he first went to join Ajahn Gavesako, and that Ven. Piyasilo also lived for several years with Ajahn Nyanarato in Ajahn Gavesako’s monastery in Kanchanaburi.

So, personal stories and linking threads, reflections and relationships. Hopefully such sharing will be useful to you in some small way on the path. This *FSN* pretty much made itself (though not without a lot of editing!), and it has done so during our Winter Retreat. Now spring is here and the monasteries will become more engaged. Relationships change, yet the path stays the same, whether covered in soft grass or icy stones of hail. May each of us grow towards a realization of that Way which truly leads to peace.

Bhikkhu Jayanto (Editor)
Obituaries

The Most Venerable Dr Medagama Vajiragnana Nayake Thera passed away peacefully in London at Hammersmith Hospital on 15th December 2006, after several years of debilitating illness. He was 78 when he died, having lived in robes for 64 years.

Ven. Vajiragnana was born in Sri Lanka in 1928. He received samanera ordination at the age of 14, and was ordained as a bhikkhu in 1949. Following an extensive Buddhist education in Sri Lanka and India, he taught at Pirivena Teachers Training College in Ratmalana before travelling to London in 1966, where he was appointed Assistant Head of the London Buddhist Vihara. There, he established classes in Buddhism and Pali – teaching for the first time in English. These classes drew many Western students; among them was Pat Stoll, the first woman to request ordination as a nun in our community.

In 1980 he was once again back in his native Sri Lanka, having taken up an invitation to be principal of the Pirivena Teachers Training College. He returned to the UK in 1984 to become Head of the London Buddhist Vihara, where he devoted his energies to serving the Sri Lankan Buddhist community and also to representing Buddhism at innumerable civic and religious functions throughout the UK. He was a founder member of the Interfaith Network for the U.K., and in 2006 was awarded an OBE for his work in promoting mutual respect and understanding among the numerous diverse faith communities in this country.

Ven. Samdech Maha Ghosananda

The Most Venerable Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda passed away on 12th March 2007, in Northampton, Massachusetts, aged 78. Ven. Maha Ghosananda’s life and work led him far from his native land – and while he often followed a spontaneous schedule known only to himself, it always had the happiness and welfare of others as its end point. He reawakened the heart of the Buddha’s message in Cambodia, calling for peace and reconciliation after the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, and was several times nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Born in Takeo Province, Cambodia, in 1929, Ven. Ghosananda entered monastic life as a novice at age 14. A gifted scholar and linguist, he earned a doctorate from the University of Nalanda in India before laying aside his studies to practise meditation with Ajahn Dhammadaro, a well known teacher in southern Thailand. It was there he first heard the heart-breaking tales from his country’s darkest years. He began walking from one refugee camp to another along the border with Thailand, which set the pattern of his life’s vocation – bringing a message of love and peace to all those divided by conflict: “Hatred can never be appeased by hatred, hatred can only be appeased by love.”

Moving to Rhode Island and Massachusetts in the 1980s, he carried on his work. “Reconciliation,” he was quoted as saying, “means that we see ourselves as the opponent. For what is the opponent but a being in ignorance, and we

Continued on next page

Last issue

We had serious problems with the print run of the last issue (no. 78), and variously flawed copies were inadvertently posted out. Our apologies if you received one! It would help us determine the extent of the problem if you could contact the editor if you received a poor copy.

Contact – FSN Editor, Amaravati; email: editor at amaravati dot org

This PDF

The online edition of the FSN uses a convention to protect email addresses from spam by rendering them in the following way:

name@organization.com is written name at organization dot com.

When your email program opens you will need to alter ‘at’ and ‘dot’ as appropriate.
Ven. Bhante Vajiragnana

(Continued from page 3)

Ajahn Sumedho’s first meeting with Ven. Vajiragnana was in 1977 when he visited the newly reopened Hampstead Vihara in order to pay respects to Ven. Ajahn Chah, then on a brief visit to England. Since then Ven. Vajiragnana has been unfailing in his support of our communities – offering help in many ways, large and small.

The most noteworthy occasion was the Amaravati Temple opening on 4th July 1999, for which he arranged an all-night chanting of parittas by monks of his community – a wholehearted response, which was echoed by others of the Sri Lankan community who arranged for ceremonial drumming and traditional dancing to amplify the drama of the occasion.

We will miss Bhante Vajiragnana – partly for the gestures of support that were always forthcoming, but – more importantly – for who he was as an exemplar of human values. I will always remember his gentle kindness, his modesty and self-effacement, and his willingness to serve in whatever way he could; attending to the needs of his congregation, meeting other religious leaders or royalty with equal attentiveness. I would feel concern sometimes at his lack of consideration for his own needs. When invited to spend time in retreat or to rest at Amaravati or in the forest at Chithurst he would always respond: “But I must get back to the Vihara – they need me there.”

Now he has gone, leaving a smile and warmth in the heart – a sense of gladness at a life well lived and the encouragement to bring the values he exemplified to our own lives and practice.

May he know perfect peace.

Ajahn Candasiri

Ven. Ajahn Sumedho receives an OBE from Queen Elizabeth II

Ven. Maha Ghosananda

(Continued from page 3)

ourselves are also ignorant of many things.” Ven. Maha Ghosananda was later made a Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhists.

In the Nineties, Ven. Maha Ghosananda led a series of walks for peace and reconciliation, called Dhammayatras, across the ravaged landscape of Cambodia’s remaining war zones. These marches became an annual institution carried on by others, which even now in times of peace promote awareness of social and environmental issues such as poverty, landmines and deforestation.

I was fortunate enough to spend my first year as a bhikkhu at the monastery in Phnom Penh where Ven. Maha Ghosananda stayed, and to join him on the 5th Dhammayatra for Peace and Reconciliation in March 1998, which focused on deforestation and the link between the military, illegal logging, and the ongoing civil war. We spent a month on the road walking from Phnom Penh to the remote forested north-eastern province of Ratanagiri. Even though we were marching through areas that were still controlled by the Khmer Rouge and annexed from the rest of the country, I well remember the love and joy that seemed to radiate from Samdech Som (as we affectionately called Ven. Maha Ghosananda) as he led the way, filling our hearts with a sense of safety and hope.

Like many great masters, Ven. Maha Ghosananda could reach others in ways suited to their character and situation, and which could inspire as well as amuse. Before we set off, I remember standing with others waiting for him to join the massing throng. Even in such a situation, which demanded his attention to the greater event at hand, Samdech Som displayed his unique ability to connect with and make time for the individuals around him. He emerged from his dwelling with several books in his hands. Making a beeline for myself and the newly disrobed David Wharton (ex-bhikkhu Suviro) who were standing nearby, he presented us with gifts: for myself, a Wheel edition of Ven. Maha Kaccana’s weighty expositions of the Buddha’s pithy sayings – and for David, along with a cheeky grin, a copy of Bhante Dhammananda’s more down-to-earth Dhamma reflections on happy marriages.

Ven. Maha Ghosananda was a loving presence and guiding light whose blessings and great accomplishments will not be extinguished by his passing. All who knew him can bear witness to the light he kindled in the ‘Heart of Darkness’, and to the Dhamma of compassion and wisdom of which his whole life was a profound illumination.

Bhikkhu Panyanando
What was your exposure to religion like growing up in Japan?

I was born into an ordinary countryside family, Buddhist but not especially religious. Like almost all such Japanese households we had both a Buddhist shrine as well as a Shinto shrine. We lived in Nara, which was the first capital of ancient Japan before it moved to Kyoto at the end of the eighth century. So I was born in an old and traditional part of Japan. There are many famous Buddhist temples there. I don’t remember anything much about going to the temple as a religious observance but for about six years as a teenager almost every day I walked through Nara Park where there are famous ancient temples, so in that way I was breathing in a traditional Buddhist atmosphere. My university was in Kyoto and that is also strongly coloured by Buddhism. Kyoto has over one thousand Buddhist temples.

How did you regard Buddhism when you were younger?

Questions of life and death became very serious at a certain point after I became a medical student, and after that Buddhism started showing its depth to me. In my teens it had been somewhat in my consciousness, but I didn’t spend much time with it mainly because I had to concentrate on the competitive schoolwork required in Japan, which is a really big thing. When I was about eleven years old, death became a question. Of course, by that time I had some notion of death as a concept, but then quite suddenly – without any external incident to stimulate this – I perceived its reality. And it really frightened me. I was powerfully scared. But to survive the education process in Japan I suppose I suppressed the question, and after some time it faded from the surface of consciousness.

When I succeeded in entering university, I knew the question was there somewhere and had not been solved; a big source of unhappiness in me was this unsolved feeling.
Then when I was a bit over 20 – I suddenly remembered. It took just one night. I was reading an introductory book on philosophy, and my mind was strongly focused and that question came up. To follow my thoughts I kept writing in my notebook: what can I value, even in the face of death? I will die – what do I need to do? I can’t do what I am doing any more. My attitude towards life changed in that one night. By dawn I had determined to stop my normal way of living. But instead of abandoning everything at once, I decided to first finish the medical course. Then instead of pursuing a career as a doctor, I would finally stop and devote myself 100% to this pursuit of the meaningful of life, so to speak. From that night my efforts in studying medicine were the barest minimum, and the rest of my time I used to start searching. It was in that context that Buddhism became important.

Did you search for ways other than Buddhism at first?

For some reason I already respected the teaching of Buddhism; I felt it had something very important. But I didn’t yet limit which way I could go. I explored anything to do with body, mind, life – with awakening. I was looking for opportunities and picking things up.

What brought you to Thailand?

I followed my determination, and when I graduated in 1984 I left Japan. That was the first time I’d left the country, the first time even on an airplane. I went to India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, and stayed for one year in those areas. I wanted to stay on but I couldn’t renew my visa, and I knew I wasn’t at all ready to go back to Japan. Some of the Western travellers I met in India suggested I go to Thailand. They knew of my spiritual interest and they said, “Yes, Thailand can be a place for that pursuit.” My return ticket went through Bangkok so instead of going back to Japan I stayed on there. From the first day I looked for places I could go to practise meditation. I would stay in each place about a month, and every few months I needed to leave the country to renew my visa. I did this for another year until I arrived at Wat Pah Nanachat. At that point I’d been thinking that maybe the next place would be the last, as I’d been travelling for some time and I wondered if I was escaping things.

At WPN I didn’t instantly feel, “Yes, this is the place.” Gradually I developed a strong connection. Looking back, I can see that I was increasingly appreciative of what WPN had to offer. I had practised intensive meditation at the places where I stayed previously. But the set-up of WPN is not for doing an intensive meditation course, but more to practise with life in general. The good-natured atmosphere, and seeing Westerners dedicating their whole lives to this form were also important in inspiring me. After a few months I asked to be an anagarika, then slowly continued in the usual way.

I was there about two years and struggling, both with the usual challenges at the beginning of monastic life, but also with difficulty in understanding all the English spoken there. Having seen my frustration, Ajahn Pasanno, the abbot, suggested I spend time with Ajahn Gavesako (a senior disciple of Ajahn Chah, who is Japanese), who had for years been on tudong in Thailand. I went to join him at a quiet place where he had gone to stay on the Laotian border, and later accompanied him in his wandering. I was fortunate because since he didn’t yet have a monastery to look after, he had enough time that I could go to him whenever I needed, and he was so kind to accept me in doing so. That close personal contact really helped me to understand the Buddhist teaching, to understand the monk’s life – both from our verbal contact and just from observing and receiving his being. Learning from the way he was.

After that, he planned to go to Japan to do a tudong there, walking from Tokyo International Airport to Hiroshima: one thousand kilometres. He asked me if I would join him and I instantly said yes! This was after my second vassa.

What was it like, on tudong in Japan?

Very hard! It was the hardest time of my monk’s life. In Thailand everything was so supportive but in Japan that wasn’t the case. It is a Buddhist country, but not Theravada; they have different ways. There were the physical difficulties of the journey, but tudong is a time you expect that kind of challenge. On top of this, for me there were many memories and emotions involved. In Thailand the
whole society is set up to support what you are doing as a monk, so even if you have your own questions you also have encouragement and protection. But in Japan you are exposed. And I had my strong connection with the culture as well; this was my first encounter with my homeland since I had left. So everything was questioned.

In general people were supportive and kind; they just had a much different way of looking at the monk’s life than Thais. It was their genuine questions I would find difficult: “Why are you a monk, abandoning and leaving everything behind? You’re a medical student, you finished the medical course, why are you doing this? How about your responsibility for your parents?” It was this kind of very raw, hot issue I could not look at at that time. And being Japanese I could totally understand their point of view. My foundation then was tiny, so I felt challenged, even from out of their kindness.

Why Hiroshima? Was it a ‘Peace Walk’?

People often asked this. “Why Hiroshima? Do you have any message or slogan?” And Ajahn Gavesako would answer: “Each step is our peace walk.” Part of it for him was just to walk, to be in the middle of modern Japan, keeping our monastic rules. He wondered how this form would work in modern Japan. That was one aspect of our experiment. But the question: what was the spiritual aspect of it? Rather than to have some external slogan for the world or something, it was: Each step is our peace walk.

Soon after we started walking, one TV station came to know what we were doing, so they followed us – every few weeks for a few days – and in the end they made a documentary. When we finished the walk to Hiroshima and I was interviewed, I said I had received lots of energy and support from people and it was a wonderful experience. That was true, yet also there was this genuine questioning for me.

After the tudong finished, we stayed in a Buddhist monastery in Tokyo for over three months to spend the vassa. It was called Honsen-ji, a very old temple in the middle of Tokyo. The abbot had some connection with Thailand. They offered us shelter as well as food every day, which wasn’t an easy thing for them; they were very kind. We still have a connection. After that we went back to Thailand. During the stay in Tokyo my struggle continued. Had I solved the questions? No. But when I came back, Ajahn Jayasaro (then the vice abbot of WPN) told people, “Oh, Nyanarato has changed.” My commitment to Thailand and the monk’s life had changed – I recognized that – so although I didn’t recognize what had happened con-

scientiously, something had changed. My life as a monk in Thailand from that time on became more clear and strong.

The next year, Ajahn Gavesako and I spent the vassa in different monasteries in Thailand. Then he decided to accept an invitation to establish his own monastery in Kanchanaburi, near the Burmese border, and invited me to join him. That was before my fifth vassa. I stayed there with him for almost ten years. Originally it was just a few huts and several hundred acres of sugar cane field. In the middle of simplicity and the bare minimum, we practised hard with enthusiasm. Later Ajahn Gavesako developed it into a proper (huge!) monastery, planting trees, building kutis and a Dhamma Hall and everything else. I did many things there, helping to manage the monastery and the Sangha. Building the monastery itself gave me joy, and also that time was still a good opportunity for me to learn from Ajahn Gavesako: about the Dhamma and about how to be a monk, how to relate with lay people; about the essential attitude in being a monk.

How did you approach Dhamma practice while you were there?

Among other things, Ajahn Gavesako teaches anapanasati as a method, a means to develop the path, based on the sixteen stages in the Anapanasati Sutta. Soon after he started the monastery this became his main teaching from a theoretical point of view. So I was practising this. But also a very important aspect of his approach is taking responsibility for oneself: always to look after our own heart, not getting caught in judgements, opinions, anger, etc. He pointed out my own responsibility not to suffer. In many ways and from many angles he would come back to this; he was very straightforward. When I made mistakes, from subtle ones to gross ones, he would point them out, how I was making myself suffer. He could be very direct with me, which could be painful but helped me to learn important things. I can see that was a very precious opportunity.
You lived there for ten years. Then what happened? How did you wind up here?

Altogether I spent about fifteen years in Thailand, including the first year as a layman looking around. Ajahn Gavesako suggested I move. He noticed in me perhaps some stubbornness; once you become too familiar with things, one’s flexibility is gone because of attachment to the situation. Maybe he also saw I lacked the opportunity to practise in a solitary situation. So he encouraged me to move on, to have a break from the place. I was reluctant, but in the end I accepted. He recommended I leave Thailand altogether. At first, I thought I would go to another forest monastery in Thailand, because I could speak Thai, but he said, “Change everything! Let go of anything familiar!” He suggested I go to Sri Lanka. Again, I felt very reluctant but gave in. That was the beginning of the year 2000.

As it happened, I went to the Buddhist holy places in India with some Japanese supporters for a short while, and then to Kathmandu in Nepal and stayed on for some time. Then the political situation in Sri Lanka got bad. The Japanese embassy was discouraging Japanese travellers from going there, so I changed my plan. The Western monasteries had been in my mind, and I had thought that maybe after Sri Lanka I could experience the West, in order to learn something about community life, and with new skills I could go back to Ajahn Gavesako’s monastery. The vassa was approaching, and to find a place before then was not easy. I asked several monasteries, including Amaravati, but they all said, “Sorry – after the vassa there might be room for you to come, but not before.” But at Chithurst, Ajahn Sucitto was really kind in coming forward. He said, “Yes. You can come.” When I read that message I was really grateful. That was the summer of 2000. It was my first time in the West.

Your being Japanese and having lived only in Asia, there must have been general cultural differences in coming to live in the UK. Were there differences in the monastic cultures as well, because things in the monasteries in the West are different than they are in Thailand? How was that for you?

It was a gentle start, and the learning is still going on. I could speak enough English, and the Vinaya standard is the same, and we all have Luang Por Chah as our core teacher; and the lifestyle – although some aspects are different – the idea of the forest tradition, not just the Vinaya standard, but the ethos of the forest tradition is still shared. So with the climate and culture of the West, I felt that, yes, something completely new is now in my life, but the Vinaya as well as the forest tradition and the language that we shared together was offering a comfortable background for me to feel at ease. And then on that comfortable background I would receive the various new experiences, and I had space to receive and contemplate them. I didn’t have to struggle with how to live, or force myself to change, particularly; I was observing internally and externally, and simply fit into the routine. So, I didn’t feel like I’d come to a completely new place. It was somewhat pleasant.

How long did you stay at Chithurst?

One year. I liked it very much, the forest is beautiful; also, in a way the setting as a monastery is more thorough, so from time to time you have dedicated time for quiet practice, which is well-structured and protected. In Thailand you don’t have to have a structure: just being somewhere everything happens around you. But in the West, because of the inevitable complications of life here – the climate, the newness of Buddhism and so forth – you have to organize your life so that you can have time for practice and developing the monastic life. I felt that the solitary periods at Chithurst were excellent, and nothing less than what’s available in Thailand.

Interesting, because often people think there’s more space in the monasteries in Thailand for personal practice, but it doesn’t always work out that way.

Right. The quietness, the respect for the monastic life was clear at Chithurst, and the community was quite together – so I liked it. When I came to Amaravati my intention was to spend one vassa here, then return to Chithurst. I wanted to spend some time living with Luang Por

Honsen-ji Temple in Tokyo. Ajahn Gavesako and Ven. Nyanarato spent the vassa here after their tudong to Hiroshima.
Sumedho. I remember that when I left Chithurst in spring I told the community I’d be back before the colour of the leaves changes.

And you never left Amaravati. Why did you want to stay here?

To be honest, the first time I’d visited I didn’t have much of an impression of the place: old school setting, not as much forest as Chithurst has, Amaravati seemed like a man-made place. Chithurst is more in nature. But when I returned here to spend the vassa, very soon I noticed this sense of … freedom is not the word, but there is a feeling of space for each of us to live within the routine. It’s not very strict; which means, for me, it’s an opportunity to do everything as my own responsibility, rather than a duty or obligation to follow the routine. We become more aware that in truth everything is our own choice; whatever we do, it is our own choice and we are responsible for it. Whether we make it something beneficial or do it in a passive way or even a limited way depends on from where each one of us relates to the situation. That was uplifting, and gave me a kind of joy. And of course, to be with Luang Por Sumedho was always very important for me. From the beginning of my monastic life in Thailand I’d had direct contact with him on his annual visits there, but no chance to live with him. To be at Amaravati, living with him very closely, that’s been a wonderful experience which is still going on. So that’s an important reason to be here.

And your practice here – has it changed? Would you talk about how your practice has developed while you’ve been here?

I can say it has developed in two ways. Luang Por’s teaching of … to describe it is difficult! The immediacy of his teaching, so to say, has shown me a very precious place to be, internally and for my whole being. I had a sense of it before, but never so clear as since I started living with him. After I came here, his direct teaching and obvious presence really helped. So Luang Por’s awakening teaching has given me this really precious, important place of ‘nowhere to go’, ‘nobody to become’.

On the level of person, there has been an integration, meaning not just me as a monk but as a human being. You see, when I went back to Japan the first time, that was a struggle. Yes, in a certain context being a monk was OK, but in being a Japanese, being in the wider society, many things had not been addressed; they were kind of unspoken areas. So although after I came back to Thailand I became firmer, and didn’t have many problems living life as a monk, there was still this kind of unspoken issue of integration: being a monk as a person in this modern world. Being here – England is in many ways similar to Japan. They are developed countries, have similar climates, are in the centre of the materialistic world. They’re not Theravada. So there are many things in common. Now these different parts of me being a monk, being a human being with a Japanese background, being one who lives in this materialistic world – all these have come to one point. I’m not playing a role of being a monk, but I am a full human being, I am one hundred per cent living here. So that is a very pleasant experience. Another way to put it is my relationship with the world has become much more open. I can go to London and come back to the monastery, I can visit Japan or Thailand, and yet I can remain as the same person in every context. That’s been very important to me.

What are some of the biggest cultural differences you’ve noticed?

When I was in Thailand, I recognized the big differences between Japanese and Thais. I thought maybe Japanese are more westernized, but after I came here I saw that, “Oh yes, it is different. Japanese are not westerners!” One difference is in how people relate to the world. The sense of ‘I’ is very clear, in not necessarily a negative or positive way, but it is clear. You need to be clear in terms of communication. Because of the position of ‘I’ in the language you almost can’t talk without using subject and object such as ‘I’ and ‘you’. But in the languages of Thais and Japanese, unless we want to particularly point that subject/object relationship out, usually we don’t have to. If you use ‘I’ too often, it becomes strange. It’s not like we are omitting the subject, but in our actual experience, the direct experience itself, we don’t hold ‘I’ as such. So the starting point is different. The sense of the subject hasn’t
arisen strongly. In English you have to say, “I feel this,” but in Thai: “Roosuk” (lit. “feel”). It doesn’t have a subject. It’s somewhat similar in English when you say, “It feels.” Before, I thought the Western way made more logical sense, but it’s not like that. In direct experience, simply ‘feel’ comes first, and then if necessary we can emphasize a sense of ‘I’. So the attitude towards life as we experience the moment is somewhat different.

**Would you say there’s less of an experience of separateness?**

There can be. It might also bring a vagueness in responsibility; in describing what’s happening, the accuracy can be less in terms of decision-making or discussion, or sharing things. So there is both a constructive as well as a weak side to it. One of the examples of this is how in Western culture the presence of the door is very clear. There are separated rooms with doors. You open the door to meet people, but in Thai houses the door doesn’t exist – not even a partition. The space is there, and then maybe you have to make your own space, which is unusual to them. And Japanese are somewhat similar. In the Western context, person A and person B come and meet and this is how to develop a friendship, but particularly in the Thai context, the starting point is already being together. Before, I thought, “Yes, person A and person B meet, and Western culture describes this very clearly, while Asian cultures are maybe not so developed in this way.” But the way we experience is itself different. It’s not necessary to hold ‘I’ as a starting point for experience: that’s just a modern Western way of approaching life, which has now gone all over the world, and people assume this is the only way human beings can experience. In Asia now we think, “Oh, yes, we should learn to think like this, it is the more advanced way.” But it is just one particular way of relating to people.

**How do you see Amaravati as a place for practising Dhamma?**

I think this is a very good place for practice. I’m not saying it’s better than other places, but it is more than good enough. Luang Por’s teaching is available, and it’s quite an open situation, so you need to be mature. This place provides an opportunity to become mature in our practice. You cannot follow certain ideas – wanting to fix things here to be a certain way – or it becomes a difficult place to practise. It is such an open place; many people can come and go. We need to be responsible for ourselves. It is an opportunity. We are allowed to be as we are, and I think that is the only way to really appreciate the life here. And as Luang Por says, to be aware, and to question: what does the Buddha’s teaching really mean? What is liberation? To understand this with one’s own being, not just theoretically, is the only way to appreciate the life here. And actually, wherever we go, that will be the way we need to be. Amaravati is a perfect example of the kind of place where we need to learn how to be.

Of course, we can’t be idealistic. We provide times to be very quiet, like the Winter Retreat or occasional group practice together, or our self-retreats, and the formal teachings. But I have learned to practise here, not just to play a role of ‘meditator’ or play a role of a Buddhist monk, but to live totally as a human being, one hundred per cent. So Amaravati offers that perspective. It sounds like quite a statement, but we need to be real, and in this place we can be real.

The path of the Buddha is not in the techniques or particular forms; if we think in this way while living at Amaravati, our understanding will be questioned. But from that questioning we can grow. If you have particular opinions and views or some fixed perception of Buddhism, then life here is not easy. Actually, what is most important? We need to recognize this. This is the only answer. And Luang Por’s teaching is always there as an immediate contemplation. We have a good Vinaya standard and good support; it’s a wonderful place.
And the young people coming to train here, they’re helped by having mentor relationships with individual senior Sangha members?

I think it’s important to have personal contact with people who can guide us. I was fortunate to have had such a time with Ajahn Gavesako. Perhaps it’s not necessary for everyone, but for many people that kind of human to human care, encouragement, and support is crucial. And support from the community is also important. Now we have many Ajahns, and a happy, harmonious atmosphere in the community. This holds each of us so we can live comfortably, peacefully, as we each meet the challenges of the kamma we carry.

One other thing I have felt has been a similarity between Amaravati and Wat Nong Pah Pong (Luang Por Chah’s monastery). The first time I felt this was when we had the World Abbots’ Meeting here about six years ago, during my first year at Amaravati. There was a sense of working together that was wonderful to see. People were so willing. From seniors to juniors and laypeople, people simply coming forward with an attitude that doesn’t draw a line about “my practice and my time”, but doing whatever was necessary to do whenever it needed to be done. That sort of happy, shared openness and willingness reminded me of what I felt at Wat Pah Pong. It’s not just community spirit, but something that I think started with Luang Por Chah’s way of teaching the monastic life. This openness to the situation means considering, where is the practice? Not in the particular form or situation, but always relating to the centre of our being – the most important thing. I think from the beginning of Luang Por Chah’s teaching that approach has formed how Wat Pah Pong is, and how the other monasteries in our tradition are, particularly Amaravati. The community here reflects that way of teaching and learning.

Having said this, as meditation monks, of course when there is the chance to have solitude and quiet settings that’s a wonderful opportunity. I really appreciate the support to have a quiet space; I value that a lot. If I say practising “in the middle of civilization” requires and helps us to be mature, I’m not saying we should always engage – that’s not the point. But on the question of how to practise in this particular context, where Amaravati is sometimes busy, I would say, “Yes, but this is an opportunity for us to be mature.” Solitude and a quiet external setting, in all Buddhist countries from the time of the Buddha, has always been essential. It is fundamental. Otherwise maybe we will go too far!
When East meets West

Ajahn Piyasilo

Ajahn Piyasilo, a Thai monk of twelve vassas who is spending a year with the community at Cittaviveka, shares some of his impressions so far.

Having been a monk in a rural part of Thailand for more than eleven years, I never thought that one day I would find myself living in the West. But here I am, thanks to a recommendation from one of my venerable Ajahns and the generous support of a lay Buddhist. People often ask how I see the differences between the East and the West and about my impression of living in England. It took me a while to reflect upon these questions and here are my responses.

When I think of the most memorable experience I have had while living in England, the first thing that comes to my mind is the chanting at Luang Por Sumedho’s 72nd birthday celebration. Since I’ve been a monk I have chanted the anumodana, the expression of appreciation for giving and generosity, numerous times, but none were like when I chanted in the Amaravati eating hall with my fellow monks, nuns and novices of various nationalities. I was so impressed that I almost cried. It was wonderful to be among a group of more than 50 people from different backgrounds and cultures, sharing the same aspiration and living in a harmonious way. The unison of the chanting was a clear example of that harmony.

With 13 nationalities represented during the vassa, Chithurst is the biggest community that I have ever lived in. For most of my years in the yellow robe, I stayed in a small monastery in the forest or lived by myself in a hermitage. It was a drastic change in my life to come to the West. One can see how it could be a cultural shock for me. However, I have been surprised by how easily I’ve been able to fit in to this Western community – just taking to it like a duck to water, as one would say. In doing so, I am very grateful to the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and all my teachers who have provided me with an excellent way of practice, enabling me to adjust to any environment without much difficulty.

To me, one of the crucial aspects of Dhamma practice is to develop the ability to go beyond the conditioned mind. Since we tend not to see how we have been conditioned by our own culture, we then have to meditate to see ourselves more clearly. Like good singers who learn to use their voice in a wider range to be able to sing better, Dhamma practitioners learn to expand beyond limitations in their own mind to find more freedom and inner happiness. Living in England provides me with more chances to reflect on my own cultural conditioning and helps me to understand more about the Western mind. Here is just one of many observations that have helped in such a way.

During late June, about a month after arriving in England, I noticed that the grass in the field near the monastery had all been cut down. It was later stacked into a big square block wrapped in black plastic. An English friend of mine explained that the hay would be kept for cattle and horses during winter. This small incident may be nothing special for westerners, but to someone from rural Thailand it is quite unusual. I’ve never seen any Thai farmer use such good planning.

In England the climate is very different from Thailand. In over 800 years of known history the people in my homeland never experienced winters severe enough to cause much death and starvation. The Thai people do not have a comparable need to be so well prepared; even in the middle of winter Thai villagers can still go out to get wild vegetables and leaves which can be used as food. Their cows and buffaloes are allowed to roam freely, feeding on the plentiful grass in the paddy fields.

Having had some experience with the cold weather in England even in late autumn, I can imagine how difficult life would be through a long winter. There must be no way to take it easy like Thai farmers do. The reason for being well prepared and organized seems obvious to me. And no doubt anyone who has grown up in a things-have-to-be-planned environment will adopt this attitude towards other aspects of life. This helps me understand the often-made observation that westerners are a lot better than Thais at planning and organization.

While we can all appreciate the many good points of being highly organized and well-managed, perhaps deep down in the mind there is a greater potential for suffering due to expectations and fear. When things do not turn out as expected, many westerners find it difficult to cope. They sometimes make the problem even worse by seeing it in a negative way. Many blame themselves when things go wrong or not as planned. In order to avoid problems that might only potentially occur, they can put even more effort into planning – which can end up in more suffering.

Thais are not any better than westerners in coping with life’s problems – and there are some harsh climates there,
believe me. Yet they tend to differently define what could be called “problems”. There is generally more acceptance of physical discomfort, feeling hot and sweaty, mosquito bites, pain and so on. Since many of their activities are not well planned, there is nothing wrong when things do not go as planned. When life presents the unexpected, they then find it is not so difficult to accept and are able to make the best of it.

Because these habitual approaches to life are deeply ingrained, we bring them with us when we enter the monastery. They clearly influence the ways our monasteries run. While monasteries in the Thai tradition tend to have a family-like administration, the Western Sangha is more like an organization. In the Western context, responsibilities are delegated to make them more efficient. Here at Chithurst monastery there are the Guest Monk/Nun, Work Monk/Nun, Chores Monk/Nun, Librarian Monk/Nun, etc. Everyone has responsibilities in running the monastery in some way regardless of how long they have been in the community.

Not only does each person have their own responsibility in a particular area, but they also take it quite seriously. I have witnessed occasions where people were offended or annoyed when someone went beyond their own area of responsibility, even with good intentions – like helping with another person’s chores. Recently the person responsible for the community white board was offended when someone wrote information on the board without asking him. There was then a community discussion about what should be done when there is important information which had not yet been written on the board by the official board-writer. I believe that many Thais would not find this topic serious enough to be discussed. They would just be happy to help or to be helped by others: merit can be made that way, they would think.

Apart from sharing out responsibilities, the Western Sangha also adopts a democratic way of decision-making. In the West now for not yet six months, I have attended more meetings here than I had during the entirety of my 11 years as a monk in Thailand. There are a lot of management issues I never saw brought up for discussion in the Thai tradition, where most of the responsibilities lie with the abbot. The whole community can just let the abbot decide and then they follow. My first five years passed without having to take part in any decision in the Sangha at all. I did not even have to relate to any lay supporters. During that period, I quite enjoyed the space and time to focus mainly on my meditation practice.

Though there are differences between the two Sanghas, it doesn’t seem useful for me to assess which is a better model. We have to take the larger cultural context into consideration. The Western branches of Ajahn Chah’s tradition have developed their ways of fitting into this cultural context in 30 years of adjustment and experimentation, and it is still an ongoing project. At the same time, as Luang Por Sumedho recently put it, we always have the Thai tradition as a prototype. We cannot neglect the connection with the Thai Sangha, and can continue to learn from it. This strong connection between East and West will be fruitful in terms of Dhamma-vinaya practice both for each individual and the community as a whole.

The main purpose of the Buddha in creating the Sangha is to support growth in spiritual life. Reflecting on this means that from time to time we must re-examine our basic needs in living a renunciant life and ask ourselves if we are still on the same track. Despite the differences in culture, those who join the Sangha share similar aspirations. In this life there will always be a common ground where everyone can meet. The message of the Buddha goes beyond any boundary, ‘East’ or ‘West’. ❄️
I was born on 31 January 1977 as the second of three children in my family. Our home town was Embilipitiya, in the southern part of Sri Lanka. Both my parents worked as civil officers in a government office there, and I studied until age 17 in the local school, earning a GCE A Level. In thinking about my childhood, I like to remember the times I stayed with my grandparents – where I went for almost every school vacation. Like all children, I used to wait for my vacation to arrive. I wanted to spend time with my dear grandparents. It was the most joyful time I had in my childhood world.

My grandfather was a village rice farmer and my grandmother helped him with household work, although actually, she was the boss. Their life was extremely innocent and relied on the earth, with a few primitive possessions. Most of the villagers were rice farmers, or rubber or cinnamon growers. Even though they were not very literate, they were far more intelligent than I thought and clever enough to teach me many things about life that literate people didn't know.

Village life was unforgettable and fascinating, making me feel innocent and heart-warming emotions. The breeze coming over the rice fields gave me a feeling that the world is harmless; it harmonized my world and me into delightful dreams. I used to work in the fields with my grandfather as best I could. He worked hard. Even though I couldn’t give him enormous support physically, I tried my best. Eating my meal in the fields with the other farmers was full of happiness, and made me see the world in a very pleasant way. When I ate my meal in the field, I tasted my food a hundred times more than at home.

The rice fields need a lot of water to plant seeds in them. So there are many little fish all the time swimming in the little brooks and waterways. It was fun to count the fish, counting how many stripes they have, guessing who is whose father and mother, who is the leader and that kind of thing. As an adult today, I feel a bit embarrassed when I remember the conversations I had with them in my mind. When I was all alone, I would silently speak with the fish.

The wildlife in the village was rich and lush. There were many kinds of wild fruit that encouraged naughty little boys to come and enjoy. I used to pick the different types of wild berries until all the little berry bushes turned purple. It still makes me happy when I happen to see a berry tree full of fruit. Finding a bush full of berries was like discovering a valuable treasure. I had my little friends who accompanied me whenever I went to pick wild berries. I remember how greedy I was when I collected them. But I could not break the children’s law of sharing them with all the others! Fortunately, they were kind to me because I was a guest; treating your guest first is always important and I got that lavishly from my friends.

All this was unknown to my grandmother, as she wouldn’t let me go to the forest because I was her responsibility, to be returned safely to my father. She was wise: going to the forest is a risk. There are many snakes, pythons and other dangerous things one might encounter in the forest. She always warned me about pythons and snakes. I was totally unaware of their danger.

Our playthings were all handmade by me or my friends with readily available things. Even our rubber ball was made of little rubber scraps we could find in the plantations. To make a toy, we only had local materials. To make a little cart we used parts of old rubber slippers, wood sticks, and threads we took from banana tree trunks in our fields.
April was New Year for us. That was the richest time for fruit trees, especially cashew fruits, mangoes, wild berries, and other more obscure tropical fruits. At that time it’s impossible to keep children from going to eat cashew fruits in the jungle. We used to go to the forest to eat cashew fruits and cashew nuts: it would be a whole day’s job with a few friends. To take the cashew nuts out, we had to make a fire and burn them in it. Eating excessive amounts of cashew fruits gives you a rough throat and sometimes makes you sick. Getting these symptoms a few times during that month was usually unavoidable, and this was the evidence for the adults to know what we’d been doing, even though we tried to hide it with vain tricks. They were hard to fool.

Like many others, my grandmother had a little plot of land growing cinnamon. The whole village smelt of cinnamon – even people’s clothes were full of a cinnamon fragrance. Even now, whenever I travel somewhere where cinnamon grows, I’m gladly reminded of my childhood with my grandparents. That fragrance is so close to my life.

My grandmother had a separate mud kitchen. Her kitchen was her life and territory: no one could go in. I always loved the delicious food my grandmother cooked. In fact, she was the best gourmet chef I ever met. I later found out the secret of why her food was so delicious. It’s because the cooking pots she used to cook with were all clay and at least twenty years old. I had heard that she had been using the same set of clay pots to cook food since my father was a child. It’s wonderful. I didn’t know how she could protect all those clay pots for such a long time, up to at least twenty years old. I had heard that she had been using the same set of clay pots to cook food since my father was a child. It’s wonderful. I didn’t know how she could protect all those clay pots for such a long time, up to my generation. She was strictly protective of every clay pot: even accidentally breaking one would get me returned home. Sometimes I felt, “Why does she love her clay pots more than me?” Reflecting on it now, I can guess her reasoning. Now I understand what wonderful lessons she tried to give me about frugality, love, respect and mindfulness in our life. I regret that I couldn’t learn or at least respect her philosophy of caring for even inanimate clay pots. It takes time to learn a lesson. We start to regret after a long time or sometimes even never understand at all. I would be really happy if I could have appreciated her lessons. I think it was because I was young and she was old.

My hero and protector in the village was my uncle. I thought he was bigger than anyone in the whole village. I thought he was unbeatable and whatever he did could not be wrong, and that as long as I slept in his room I would be safe from ghosts. He used to tell me spooky stories. I loved him because he didn’t stop me from my mischievous activities.

These childhood times in the village were unique and unforgettable in my life. It was such an innocent, harmless and non-competitive world. This time in “heaven” would end when my father came to collect me for school, which was like a “hell” in comparison. It was like going back to the battlefield, where merciless people always wanted to make me how they thought I should be.

I was 17 years old when the sudden change in my life began after watching a movie about the life of a hermit. I wanted to see the monk who lived in my village temple. He was surprised at my change but extended his hand to help me. He was anxious that he would get blamed by my father if I left home, but as he couldn’t ignore my request he at least pointed me to somewhere I could do meditation retreats. Then one day he took me to a little monastery about 50 miles away from my home. As soon as I saw this monastery, I decided it would be an ideal place to renounce the world. We arranged a date for me to come and stay with the monks there, but by the time we came back home my father had already come to know what I’d done. He told me very strictly that I should not leave home and he scolded the monk who helped me to find the monastery.

But somehow, with my mother’s blessing I found a way to escape from home to go for a one-month meditation retreat. My mother felt that at least I would be a better person after the retreat, and she was not much worried since she thought I would come back even before one month. I will always appreciate her daring to clear my way to escape the world that I didn’t want to live in. I later learnt that she was blamed by my father for letting me leave. I heard also my father cried on the day I left even though he was a very strong-minded man. It was the only time I know of that he cried for someone. I was 17 years old when the sudden change in my life began after watching a movie about the life of a hermit. I wanted to see the monk who lived in my village temple. He was surprised at my change but extended his hand to help me. He was anxious that he would get blamed by my father if I left home, but as he couldn’t ignore my request he at least pointed me to somewhere I could do meditation retreats. Then one day he took me to a little monastery about 50 miles away from my home. As soon as I saw this monastery, I decided it would be an ideal place to renounce the world. We arranged a date for me to come and stay with the monks there, but by the time we came back home my father had already come to know what I’d done. He told me very strictly that I should not leave home and he scolded the monk who helped me to find the monastery.

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and gave me an English dictionary and books of Ajahn Chah. I learned English by slowly translating them until I understood. I might be the only person Ajahn Chah ever taught English to. I was surprised when I later learned he could not speak it himself!

Eventually, I found a forest hut where I spent an unforgettable period of my life. That little hut was my heaven for some time. I lived two miles into the jungle. It was enjoyable, but the lifestyle had many risks: mainly from wild animals, such as elephants, leopards, snakes and fierce insects. I was always afraid of encountering an elephant or a leopard. Fortunately I never met any elephants, only elephant dung sometimes. Somehow I managed to stay there for one year without being harmed by any of them. Every day I was woken by the singing of birds. There were many varieties. I liked one kind especially, because their song almost sounded like my name. I had a beautifully pure river in which to quench my thirst and bathe. Everything in that jungle was intact, without human interference. I was the first person that drank and bathed in the river; it was as if flowing from some kind of heaven – like I was living in a heaven.

I used to go for almsround every day to a little village where about 25 families lived. Half of the month I went to another village about 5 miles away. I ate only one meal a day. I would be able to eat everything they gave me because I was extremely hungry after waiting 24 hours without food. The people in the village were poor and primitive. Their main form of wealth was water buffaloes. There was no properly accessible road, not even a push-bike in the whole village, let alone other things. Most of the villagers were rice farmers and a few were hunters. They treated me like their own son. They were always anxious for me until I came back to the village each day – especially at times of heavy lightening. Then they saw that I was still alive, and they felt happy.

By this time I had read books of teachings of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho. Their teachings were wonderful and I wanted to keep them in my mind. Wherever I lived, I tried to reflect on Ajahn Chah’s teachings as best I could. I liked the forest tradition even then as I do now. Eventually, with the help of Ajahn Vimalo and my longtime friend Ven. Nanananda, I managed to come to Amaravati.

As you can probably guess, coming to Amaravati seems like a miracle to me whenever I consider my past. It is almost unthinkable that I am here today. One thing I can certainly say is I could never have even dreamed that something about me would someday be published in the Forest Sangha Newsletter when I first read a copy many years ago in Sri Lanka. Things happen in such unexpected ways. Dreams can come true even though you don’t think they can. There are things in your life that you’d like to reach but seem unreachable, yet finally become reachable in wonderful and unexpected ways. Everything – coming to stay here, and publishing this article about me is like an “undreamed dream” coming true in my life. Everything is unexpected, not sure, not predictable.
Amaravati Lay events 2007

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA):
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. Days of Practice – no need to book.
9.45am for 10–5pm. (Day of Practice – Equanimity)

Family events
Booking forms and further information about all family events can be downloaded from www.family.amaravati.org

Amaravati: if you have reasonable maintenance skills and an interest to live and practise with the monastic community as site caretaker for at least a year, please apply to the Amaravati Secretary.

Site caretaker needed
A space has arisen for a lay resident at Amaravati: if you have reasonable maintenance skills and an interest to live and practise with the monastic community as site caretaker for at least a year, please apply to the Amaravati Secretary.

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Days of Practice – no need to book
9.45am for 10–5pm (Please bring food to share)
Retreats – advanced booking essential
5.30pm Fri – 4 pm on the last day.
May 18–20th – retreat – Wisdom & Effort
Sat Jun 2nd – lay ministry day
July 6–10th – five-day retreat – ‘Living Daily Life as an Opening for Reflection’

Day of Study and Practice
Saturday 2nd June 2007
Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
On the theme of Lay Ministry
Prison Chaplaincy; Armed Forces Chaplaincy; Hospital Chaplaincy; Buddhist Healthcare Chaplaincy Group
9.30am: Hot drinks 10am: Welcome 12.30 Shared meal 5pm: Tea
Organized by the Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association

Day of practice for women
(Amaravati) Buddhist Women’s Network:
Sun June 3rd – ”Dhamma Dilemmas” – An opportunity for lay women to extend and deepen spiritual friendship. No need to book. 9.45am for 10am-5pm. Bring food to share. For information, contact Jenni Jepson: tel. (0198) 689 9083

Family events
Booking forms and further information about all family events can be downloaded from www.family.amaravati.org

Rainbows Weekend: May 25–28th
Family Camp Weekend: June 22–24th
Family Summer Camp: August 18–22th
For booking information for these events contact: Tim Haggard, 103 Tamworth Road, Hertford SG13 7DN
email: tim.haggard@ntlworld.com
phone: 01992 302643

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

Aruna Ratnagiri

Vesakha Puja (Wesak) will be celebrated on Sunday, May 27th

Meditation Retreats 2007
The 2007 Summer Retreat will take place from 4–11th August and will be led by Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Abhinando together. For information and booking visit our website (www.ratanagiri.org.uk/retreat.htm) or contact Jim Holt at the monastery by phone 01992 302643 or in writing. We also anticipate holding weekend retreats as soon as Kusala RetreatHouse is fully functioning. Keep an eye on RETREATS on the website. Please be aware that we won’t be able to offer an Easter Retreat at Harrham this year.

Cittaviveka

Vesakha Puja (Wesak) will be celebrated on Sunday, May 27th

Lay Forum: Sun April 22nd
Forest Day: Sun April 29th
Garden Day: Sun May 13th

Rocana Vihara Open Day
Sat 28th July – Programme to be announced.
All welcome!

There will be more dates for June and July: please check our website (www.cittaviveka.org) or contact us for more information.

Forest Days and Garden Days are occasions when visitors can help to support the monastery with some simple forestry and gardening projects. We meet at the monastery at 1 pm. Lay Forums are occasions for dialogue on themes that integrate Buddhist practice with daily life.

Bodhinyanarama

News from Wellington:
It’s been summer Down Under, which is a suitable time to visit sunny New Zealand, and we’ve had visits from a number of the Sangha. In early January Ajahn Vajiro arrived to spend three weeks with us before visiting friends in the North. Then Ajahn Munindo and Anagarika Richard visited in early February. On February 16th nearly all the Western monks in NZ arrived simultaneously for the Patimokkha at Bodhinyanarama. Thus we were also joined by Bhante Guttasila, a senior NZ monk living in Sri Lanka, and Ajahn Chandako, who was returning to Vinmotti Monastery after a tuition in the South Island.

Ajahn Ariyasilo was away in February, helping at Santi Forest Monastery while Ajahn Sujato was away in Asia. Meanwhile, we...
have had quite a few visitors, both local and overseas, so we’ve been able to keep up with the summer gardening and path clearing. Peter has arrived from Germany and will be taking the Anagarika precepts soon.

Our increased meditation retreats have been well-attended, and the local Insight Group has used our facilities for a non-residential retreat.

Our new kitchen project has been officially launched, and we hope to accomplish more maintenance work before the Autumnal rains once again begin to nourish the lush forests of Bodhinyanarama.

NEW MONASTERY
Ajahn Viradhammo, who has been in Canada helping to care for his mother in recent years, has started a new branch monastery near Ottawa, called Tisarana Buddhist Monastery (see the back page for contact details). Ajahn Kusalo is helping with this – and he mentions they now have a need for male lay stewards, for any men wishing to live there quietly and lend a hand. Much more information can be found at their website: www.tisarana.ca.

Amaravati Library
The collection of 10,000 books available at Amaravati for the Sangha and lay visitors is being computerized. Each book has to be entered individually on a database, and the project will take some time. If you would like to come to the library and contribute by entering a few books on a regular basis please email Caro at:
library at amaravati dot org
or leave a message.
Computing beginners and adepts both welcome.

UK BUDDHIST SANGHA
The Theravada Buddhist Sangha in the UK – TBSUK
A meeting at Amaravati of senior monks representing most Theravada Buddhist temples and monasteries in the UK agreed on Sept. 13th 2006 to organize as The Theravada Buddhist Sangha in the UK (TBSUK) in order to “better preserve and serve the needs of Theravada Buddhism in this country…”

“The Sangha has been established in this country for many years but … with no central authority or point of contact we recognise the difficulty that Government or any other agency might have had in liaising with us…. With the establishment of the TBSUK there is now a point of contact for the Theravada Sangha and we believe … it is well placed to offer informed and authoritative opinion on Buddhist matters in this country.”

Ven. Chao Khun Bhavanavitesa (Luang Por Khenadhammo) OBE, abbot of The Forest Hermitage, will for the time being be coordinating development of the TBSUK and will be its point of contact.

SANGHA WALKS
Organized by Nick Scott:

Walking-Retreat in Crete with Ajahn Sucitto
One week: May 1–8th
Limited to 8 men and 8 women. You must be reasonably fit, have a head for heights, supply your own equipment and have done previous meditation retreats.

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 Tatra 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.

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@amaravati.org

Sangha walks in Norway
Organized by Luke Hindmarch:
Time period: 9 days in late June and July.
Join us for two separate walks for women and men respectively across high moorland in Norway with Ajahn Anandabodhi and/or other nuns and with Ajahn Rattana-wanno and another monk. Simple accommodation and food is provided along the route – so no heavy backpacks needed. A third group is being organized using more comfortable lodges and a flexible programme. See the website for all the details: http://uk.msnusers.com/sanghawalks

Ajahn Candasiri
will teach a 7 Day Retreat in the Czech Republic at Josefuv Dul in the Jizerske Mountains
5th – 12th July, 2007
Contact: Buddha Mangala, Ms. Jitka Haskova, Churanovska 5/2694, 150 00 Praha 5, Czech Republic
email: mangala at buddha dot cz
Recommended donation to cover accommodation and food for the week is 95 Euros

Glossary — Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter not explained elsewhere
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. Often used, they have generally not been italicized.

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.
anapanasati: mindfulness of the breath, usually practised as a formal meditation technique.
bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk.
Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.
Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
kuti: A hut, usually in the forest.
Luang Por: (Thai) A title of affectionate respect (lit. “Venerable Father”).
parittas: Discourses of the Buddha traditionally considered auspicious.
Patisokkha: 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.
Theravada: The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.
tudong: austere contemplative wandering, relying on faith and meditation.
vassa: The summer “Rains” retreat; a mark of how many years (“vassas”) a monk or nun has been in robes.
Vinaya: The monastic discipline.
**INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION**

**amaravati**

Saturday Afternoon Classes 2 pm—4 pm

Meditation instruction for beginners, with an opportunity for questions and dialogue.

Classes are in the Bodhinyana Meditation Hall.

Feel free to come along — no booking is necessary.

**CONTACTS AND PRACTICE VENUES**

**ENGLAND**

Bath  Bill & Carol Huxley: (0122) 531 4500
Bedford  David Stubbs: (0123) 472 0892
Berkshire  Anthea West: (0118) 979 8101
Brighton  Nimnala: (0273) 372 3378
Sam Halter: (01788) 882 1525
Bristol  Lisa Daix: (0117) 935 0272
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Canterbury  Charles Watters: (0122) 746 3342
Carlisle  Jean Nelson: (0122) 854 3491

**Hemel Hempstead Bodhinyana Group:**

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**Kendal Fallsied Centre, Low Fallsied:**

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**Liverpoll:**

Ursula Haeckel: (0151) 427 6668

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**London-Notting Hilj Jeffery Craig:**

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Barry Durrant: (0173) 082 1479
Vivian Bell: (0173) 081 2362

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**Newent-Glocues.**

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Ian Thompson: (0160) 362 9129

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Lee: (0173) 676 2135

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Medhavi: (0239) 273 2280

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**Southampton**

Robert Elliot: (0238) 061 2838

**Steyning, Sussex**

Jayanto: (0190) 381 2130

**Stroud**

John Groves: (0796) 777 7742

**Surrey-Woking**

Rocana: (01483) 376 1398

**Taunton**

Annie Fisher: (01278) 845 7245

**Teesside**

David Williams: (01642) 260 3481
John Doyle: (01642) 238 7274

**Totnes**

James Whelan: (0180) 386 5667

**OUTSIDE ENGLAND**

Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre (+353) 61 367 073
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Edinburgh
Neil Howell: (0131) 226 5044
Glasgow: James Scott: (0141) 637 9731
Machynlleth, Wales: Angela Llewellyn: (01654) 051 1350
Pembrokehire, S. Wales: Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson: (0123) 982 079

**AMARAVATI RETREATS**

**Retreat Schedule 2007**

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
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</thead>
<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 Karunik**</td>
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<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>4–13 May</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Vajiro**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>25–27 May</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Anandabodhi**</td>
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<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>8–17 June</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Thanasanti**</td>
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<td>R6</td>
<td>29–1 July</td>
<td>Thai Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Ratanawanno</td>
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<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>13–17 July</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Sundara**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>28 July–9 Aug.</td>
<td>13 Days</td>
<td>Luang Por Sumedho**</td>
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</table>

* Fully booked for women; ** Fully booked.

(Experienced meditators only)

**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 not 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
- Emailing the Retreat Centre
- Writing to the Retreat Centre

Then either post or email 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

Email: retreats at amaravati dot org

Website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org
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Moon Phase

<table>
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<th>Month</th>
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<th>FULL</th>
<th>HALF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>2 (Mon)</td>
<td>10 (Tue)</td>
<td>16 (Mon)</td>
<td>24 (Tue)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>1 (Tue)</td>
<td>9 (Wed)</td>
<td>16 (Wed)</td>
<td>24 (Thu)</td>
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<td>MAY/JUNE</td>
<td>31 (Thu)</td>
<td>8 (Fri)</td>
<td>14 (Thu)</td>
<td>22 (Fri)</td>
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<td>JUNE/JULY</td>
<td>29 (Fri)</td>
<td>7 (Sat)</td>
<td>14 (Sat)</td>
<td>22 (Sun)</td>
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Observance Days

These days are traditionally given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome: contact the individual monasteries for specifics, as routines vary.

Vesakha Puja (Wesak)

ASSOCIATED MONASTERIES

BRITAIN

Amaravati Monastery

Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, NE20 OHF

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Cittaviveka
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ITALY

Santacittarama
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North American distribution of the Forest Sangha Newsletter is handled by Abhayagiri Monastery: please contact them directly to be put on the N. American mailing list.

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To receive the Forest Sangha Newsletter in Thailand, please write to Amaravati.