Do not ignore the effect of right action saying, 'This will come to nothing.' Just as by the gradual falling of drops the water jar is filled, so in time the wise become replete with good.

Paññananda Bhikkhu 1911–2007
As one year ends and another begins, many of our monasteries (in the northern hemisphere) prepare to enter a three-month winter retreat. In a way, it is our vassa – although the actual vassa occurs from July to October or thereabouts.

The vassa, or ‘Rains Season’, was the period of the year when the Buddha’s disciples would stop in one place for at least three months, until the monsoon had ended. Accordingly the Sangha’s discipline requires that we determine a suitable place to reside for the duration of that period. In the forest monasteries of Thailand it’s a time when the resident community is usually all together, returning from wandering or periods of practice elsewhere, and a special atmosphere of dedicated Dhamma practice throughout that period is the norm.

In Europe and North America the monsoon doesn’t apply; rather, the weather during the vassa tends to be the most appropriate of the year for movement and activity. It’s the winter months, when it’s cold, damp and dark, which are effectively our Rains (or Snows as the case may be).

The turning of the year, then, is seen as a kind of stopping and restarting point in the monasteries as well as in society. It’s a time of finishing up and beginning a different cycle, one with a vassa-like special community atmosphere of dedicated practice. So the January edition of the Forest Sangha Newsletter, coming as it does at this time, is a good place for checking-in with the various Sangha communities at least in some way each year.

The contributions included this time around were invited with the idea they could take whatever form – whether an article, a brief message or series of photos, or a kind of community report. Some are longer, some are short, some written from a personal perspective, and others are ‘from the Sangha’. And for more … of course there is the Web. The Sangha website, www.forestsangha.org, is a portal to each monastery. You’ll find a lot there, including an updated list of current Sangha community members.

So as a new year begins, may we in the Sangha wish you well-being in the Dhamma, and offer our anumodana for all skilful actions taken to further the Way.

Bhikkhu Jayanto
Tan Chao Khun Paññananda's life resonated with a kind of purity. He was one who had the tendency from an early age to become a monk. Intuitively, one always felt that he was a man of integrity, and trustworthy in every way. He was quite sophisticated. He could speak English, had travelled in the West and took a great deal of interest in spreading the Dhamma abroad. He has a number of branch monasteries in America.

I first met Luang Por Paññananda when I was still a layman practising meditation in Bangkok in 1966, but only briefly. Later on he came to Wat Pah Pong sometimes to see Ajahn Chah, and I got to know him as a respected monk associated with Ajahn Buddhadasa, one of the most famous monks in Thailand. He was always very welcoming and friendly. He had great regard for Ajahn Chah's monks and style of teaching.

When Luang Por Chah became ill and couldn’t really teach or travel any more, Tan Chao Khun Paññananda was very helpful. He filled in as an elder Thai monk to whom I could go and who was interested in what we were doing in England. He was supportive both spiritually and also financially. He would raise money in Thailand to help support our monasteries in England as we were becoming established here. Over the years he would come and stay with us; he was one of the references we had for the Thai Sangha. Every time I went to Thailand I’d try to visit him at his temple, Wat Cholpratan.

He could express strong opinions, and was a monk who was trusted by the Thai people because he had a reputation for being impeccably straight. I remember several times he was banned from radio and television. What he said was honest and forthright but perhaps threatening to the existing government.

One time I heard he’d been banned from his regular Sunday television programme. When I went to see him he was smiling and joking about it; he didn’t seem to take it all that seriously. But that’s why he was generally held in such high regard by Thais: because he would tell the truth to the people. Sometimes with other monks in leadership positions – it’s not that they intentionally deceive, but they don’t say anything about obvious things that are wrong in the society or the government. He was fearless in that respect. The Thai people had a great love for him.

He seemed completely selfless, always working for others. When the area around his monastery had grown considerably and the local people no longer had adequate medical facilities nearby, Tan Chao Khun Paññananda offered to raise the funds to build a hospital. When people found out that he was in charge of building it the money kept flowing in. He determined not to travel during that time, and for several years he stayed in his residence at Wat Cholpratan to receive people. For every person who came, if they wanted to give something for the hospital he’d write out a receipt for them personally – whether it was for one baht (Thai currency) or a million – so that the poorest Thai was treated with equal respect to the wealthy. He raised an enormous amount of money and built a six story hospital furnished with all the equipment a modern hospital needs. This was because people trusted him. They knew there would be no corruption.

It impressed me enormously, how important the Buddhist Sangha is in a country like Thailand where the people tend to mistrust the police and politicians and look to either the King or the Sangha for those that they can trust. Throughout his entire life Tan Chao Khun Paññananda was considered somebody worthy of trust and respect, from the time he was young until his passing away.

Luang Por Paññananda received Aj. Sumedho in Thailand, May ’07

Tan Chao Khun Paññananda Bhikkhu, born May 11, 1911, passed away on October 10th. Revered throughout Thailand, he was also a key figure in the evolution of our community in the UK.

Luang Por Sumedho offers a few memories....
The good-natured rhythms of life in the male monastic community at Amaravati have continued in 2007. A mix of retreats, pujas, work, movements, silent time, visitors, various projects and personal space are par for the course of the year-long routine, with the encouragement to recognize and maintain a deeper awareness of the mind and body being the all-encompassing ethos.

The year began as usual, with three months of silent, spacious retreat for the entire Amaravati community. We were well looked after by a group of lay supporters who took care of the kitchen and other essential duties, making it possible for the anagarikas to have a full retreat as well. Along with a gradual resumption of activity to do with external commitments and monastery maintenance, April also usually sees a gathering at Amaravati of senior monks and nuns arriving for various meetings. This signals another three-month period in spring and early summer, between the winter retreat and the vassa, where community movements are likely to take place, tudongs undertaken, invitations taken up, and a generally unpredictable flow of monks and novices are in and out of residence for various lengths of time. The daily routine continues throughout, with pujas and Observance night sittings, work in the mornings five days a week and the rest for personal practice.

2007 had its share of comings and goings. This was the first year that Amaravati has been without the presence of Ajahn Jutindharo since he arrived 14 years ago from Chithurst. Taking up the abbot’s mantle at Hartridge Monastery, Ajahn Jutindharo left us in May. With Ajahn Nyanarat before leaving for managing community affairs on behalf of the male Sangha. He has coped accordingly as the community finds and fills the gaps.

In addition to long visits from monks such as Ajahn Anando, who, having started at Amaravati over a decade ago is now living in Thailand, we have seen new members join and old members depart the monastic community this year. Anagarikas Paresh, Yanis and Antonin (British, Latvian, and Czech respectively) have entered the community this year, while Anagarika Adin left in May to live in a Zen community in America. In July Anagarika Bruno became Samanera Tissaro and Samanera Adicco became a bhikkhu, spending the vassa at Cittaviveka before returning here for our Kathina along with Tan Dhammiko. Two more senior monks were added to the ranks, both having spent time at Bodhinyanarama in New Zealand: Ajahn Dhammiko and Ajahn Ariyasil earlier in the year and Ajahn Ariyasil after the vassa.

After a year with us Tan Ahimsako returned to Abhayagiri in June; he’ll be remembered with bright appreciation. As will Tan Nyanadassano who left before the vassa, spending a month at Dhammadara before joining the community at Santacittarama. By the time this newsletter is posted Ven. Subaddho will also have moved. After many years participating and giving a great deal at Amaravati he will be joining Ajahn Jutindharo and the small, quiet community in Devon. Ven. Suddhano, who joined us for the vassa after many years at Cittaviveka and a short spell in Thailand, has departed for his native Philadelphia … and may or may not be returning. And for most of this year Ajahn Suriyo, who started as an anagarika at Amaravati nearly 20 years ago, has been staying at the Sangha residence of Pin Mill, a hermitage in Suffolk which has recently been sold. For all of his time in the Sangha, Ajahn Suriyo has had to bear with a rare and debilitating illness which has defied every attempt at identification and cure, while at the same time living the renunciant life of a monk. After years of consideration he finally decided that in order to be better able to work with his condition he would put down the training and return to lay life – at least for a number of years.

This year saw another departure. As noted in the last issue of the newsletter, we were shocked by the tragic death of long-term lay resident Alan Cole. Struggling with depression and under medical supervision for
some time, Alan took his own life on August 25th. Two funerals were held, one at Amaravati and one in Covent Garden, attended by Alan’s family and friends in the Sangha and from his previous life as a street performer, as well as parents and children who remember him fondly for his creative participation in the Amaravati Family Camps. A one hundred days memorial for Alan was held at Amaravati on December 2nd, and a tree planted in his memory at the spot near the drive where he practised his daily Tai Chi. Perhaps the area will become ‘Alan’s Grove’ as we carry his memory into the future, offering the benefits of our practice to support his well-being in the Way.

Beside the movements, in the foreground has remained the bulk of the resident Sangha. Luang Por Sumedho, while accepting outside invitations as he has always done and being away from time to time, is nevertheless a continual, joyous and wise guiding presence at the monastery and within the monks’ community.

2007 at Amaravati was in one way reminiscent of the days before the Temple, with pujas held in the Sala for most of the year due to the glacial pace of work to replace the Temple’s underfloor heating. This should be finished soon…. Another seemingly endless project has concerned the Amaravati Stupa. With the stability of its foundations under question since the surrounding raised platform has been slowly sinking, patient observation has been the approach to assess whether and how much rebuilding might be needed. The stupa itself seems on solid enough ground, but while we wait to see, visitors have been asked not to climb the steps to the tiled level. Soon there should be a shrine table in front for those who wish to make offerings. The mound itself on which the stupa rests has recently been covered with turf, improving its looks immeasurably.

We also look forward to the possibility of expanding the accommodation available for the Sangha. This summer we received permission to build seven new kutis along the edges of the field. The plan is for four new kutis for nuns and three for monks. This will greatly help the process of providing more secluded living spaces for the Sangha at Amaravati, which has for the most part been making do with the buildings we inherited from the school formerly on this property.
Ajahn Anandabodhi and Santacitta will be spending eight weeks of the winter retreat on the West Coast to further the connections already made and Ajahns Thanasanti and Upekkha will go in the spring. There is also a very real possibility now to establish a small monastic residence for nuns in Scotland.

In the summer, a number of senior nuns and monks travelled to Hamburg to attend the International Congress on Buddhist Women, which was instigated by the Dalai Lama. It was very helpful for us to connect with the wider Buddhist community and to consider the momentum for bhikkhuni ordination and our own situation as ten-precept nuns. This sparked some lively debate in the community as a whole about the place of women samanās in the Theravadan tradition.

During vassa each of the nuns and anagarikas had the opportunity for some time in solitary retreat. We also had weekly Vinaya classes and monthly Vinaya review days, studying the training and how we apply it in our lives. Our monthly Dhamma days also brought much joy and inspiration.

In November we were happy to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Siladhara Sangha, commemorating the ordination of the first four nuns and rejoicing in the continued evolution of this community of female Sangha members.

Looking ahead, Ajahn Sundara has been invited to Thailand over the winter for a long-needed hip replacement operation. We are glad to have Ajahn Can dasiri back with us in the community and we are looking forward to Ajahn Upekkha’s return in January. Ajahn Metta will be leaving in January for a sabbatical year. She will be travelling to Sri Lanka and India and intends to spend much of her time on retreat.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the people who have offered their support to the nuns’ community in so many ways over the years. We are blessed to live the samanā life and to have the full encouragement to work to liberate our hearts from delusion and in this way to be a support and example to others.

May all beings be liberated.
At the time of writing this article Kathina season 2007 is drawing to a close. Somehow this year’s festivals seemed lovelier than ever. Maybe it is the time of year – bright skies and sunny days; maybe it is the extra-rich golden leaves on the trees. Or perhaps it was noticing more clearly how rewarding it is when we meet as spiritual community – a shared participation in the goodness of life. For the laity the Kathina was, as always, an occasion of abundant material sharing, more than enough to see us through the winter months ahead. And the resident Sangha in our own way did what we could to prepare the monastery so that visitors coming here would remember what places like this are for. Sharing the space of ‘sanctuary’ can be a source of great joy.

To this end, here at Harnham over the last year a lot of effort has gone into completing Kusala Guest House. Well, at least getting it into a usable condition. And it is being used. Many are taking the opportunity to spend time in it and appreciating the possibilities it presents. Already for the year 2008 we have five retreats planned, which is a considerable increase in what we have been able to offer in recent years. Two of those retreats are women-only, one is for men; and this is besides the usual mixed retreats (see www.kusalahouse.org, under Activities). And there has been a significant sharing of skills from local friends who have taken on responsibility for maintaining the place.

A worldly approach to the increased workload involved in running such a large building might be to employ someone to get the cleaning done and the bedding washed. A spiritual approach is to listen to what a heart of gratitude has to say. In this case gratitude for the facility is readily expressing itself as willingness to get involved. This is an important aspect of sharing in the task of figuring out how the lay community have their spiritual needs met. An important part of the responsibility of the resident Sangha is to establish, maintain and protect the sanctuary. Just how this space is used is a question for the entire community.

These days, thanks to technology, we have considerably extended by way of the internet our field of engagement with the larger community. A lot of appreciation (and a moderate amount of criticism) has been received from all around the world for this effort. The www.dhammatalks.org.uk website is visited by thousands of users and www.dhamathreads.org distributes globally thousands of CDs. This takes time and energy but for those involved, Sangha and lay community members, it is offered most willingly. And it is a cause for the arising of contentment. In a society where we easily lose sight of our good fortune, falling prey to the discontentment on which a consumer economy exists, it is perhaps more important than ever that we occupy ourselves in pursuits that enhance the goodness, not overshadow it. One reason we called our new guest house Kusala – Pali for goodness – is to encourage visitors to more consciously abide in the goodness they already have and to feel protected against the heedless habit of always wanting more.

Also these days, taking up a suggestion made by a recent newcomer, every new moon and full moon we send out, via email, a short Dhamma reflection along with a verse from the Dhammapada aimed at reminding us to stay connected with what our heart tells us is the priority (if you’d like to be included simply send your email address to dhammasakaccha at gmail dot com). When we remember what we need to remember, our life flows in accord with ‘what is’ and contentment abounds; when we forget, we project onto ‘what we imagine is’ and confusion is born.

Participation in spiritual community means we are supported in this kind of remembering. In this context we are helped to discover new ways of meeting all aspects of our life. Each Sunday evening at 5.30 p.m. a gathering takes place at the monastery before Evening Puja for this kind of activity. Sometimes the Sangha are present, sometimes not. But the spirit of meeting in a manner that is referenced to reality, not referenced to ego-needs, generates an atmosphere that both supports and challenges in relevant ways. For in spiritual community it is not only the support which emerges from shared happiness that nourishes practice. Difficult questions can also be safely raised up into awareness. When the group receives the question collectively, without judgement, the individual is afforded the
chance to see the question in a new way. That which had been a source of frustration transforms into energy and new understanding.

It is a wonderful thing to know there are no ‘disallowed’ questions. One of the signs of fundamentalism is the existence of ‘no-go’ areas. If the dialogue we are engaged in is interrupted by the perception that certain questions are not allowed, then (often unconsciously) the feeling of safety diminishes. And to the degree our heart closes, the spirit of shared enquiry is compromised. It is true, some questions can lead to feelings of being threatened. But as members of the Buddha-Dhamma community our commitment is to learning – learning to recognize where our attachments cause us to experience ourselves as limited – and not merely to attaching to good feelings. Mindful, patient communication means there is the best chance we’ll get the timing right, and by staying in touch with the good place in ourselves out of which our question arises, we can find those ‘just right’ words which effectively say what we want to say. As our aspirations to walk this not-easy Way are affirmed, gratitude naturally arises. When such goodness is consciously shared it strikes up a harmonious resonance, producing a tangible sense of spiritual community.

I am reminded now of some words from a James Taylor song from a few decades ago – a time of emergence of another beautiful community:

_Maybe it’s the time of year_  
_Yes, and maybe it’s the time of man_  
_And I don’t know who I am_  
_But life is for learning …_

Ajahn Munindo
The lovely golden brown and russet reds of autumn foliage at Chithurst make you think that getting old can be beautiful.

An advantage of living in a monastery that has sizeable woodland, is to get a sense that along with sudden events, there is steady growth. Over the last 28 years we have been replanting and increasing the amount of tree cover present over the 170 acres of Cittaviveka. This year is no exception and as usual, we have set aside a period of up to a month during which volunteers and residents commit to five days a week of a regular day’s work in the woods. It takes a while, but we get to see the results of this work: sturdy young trees, wild flowers, shady groves and an increase in the numbers and diversity of wildlife. The place is a sanctuary to birds, badgers, foxes and deer, as well as fungi, lichen and heather. And for a contemplative, apart from offering places for retreat, the woodland also demonstrates the ease with which nature, in its growing, takes care of itself. It’s a good reminder for the process of cultivating the mind: set up supportive conditions, guard the young growth against damage, and then attend with care. In due time, a Refuge is discerned.

This Rains Season has also been a season of particular events, and due celebration. In August, our most elderly resident, Ajahn Thitadhammo, notched up his seventy-first year, and we marked the occasion with an exhibition of some of his extensive portfolio of drawings. They have to be seen. We hope to post some up on our www.cittaviveka.org. (Chithurst)

The conventions and protocols of the Buddha’s Way have always, even during the time of the Buddha, allowed for a process of adaptation and change. Certainly there are constant norms: all of the many traditions now extant would agree upon morality, renunciation and mind-cultivation as being the path to the Deathless. But the Buddha did keep adapting the training rules during his lifetime and set up criteria within which to judge the need for future adaptation in accordance with the agreement of the Sangha, and provided that such adaptation supports the Dhamma-Vinaya. Some of these adaptations respond to climate, or to emphases on spiritual interests, such as devotion, but most take into account the mores of the local culture. Accordingly in the Asian homelands of Buddhism there are now many differences between the forms of Buddhism in Tibet, Korea, China, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the rest. However one thing that differentiates traditional East from contemporary West is the role and position of women in the society. Accordingly one of our ongoing topics of debate and adaptation is how to mirror the gender norms of Western lay society whilst keeping true to the lineage that has given us so much. It’s a topic that can arouse strong views. Over 25 years, we’ve tried to keep to a pragmatic focus, to what works, what enables communities and individuals to grow. And giving things the time to develop naturally from wholesome causes and conditions. It’s a process which a forest monastery readily presents: stay connected to the roots and the earth, grow and bend and head for the light.

In terms of following the guidance of the Buddhist tradition, all of us have the job of translating the words and ideas into living, flowing, holistic experience. And although we’re all wearing robes and part of a tradition, the Sangha is made up of specific individuals. Just these acts of recognition affect meditation and training. You work with what you have in front of you, and the first job is to understand and know how to work: when to wait, when to go forward, when to adapt.

Much the same style informs other developments in the monastery. Things flow and pause at an unexpected rate. They move along, not exactly according to some great design but through specific acts of goodness within the overall framework. This year, funds have been coming in to pay off the debt incurred in purchasing Rocana Vihara in downpours and spurts, through individual donations, and collective efforts. (An amazing amount has been given, but the debt still needs to...
The past twelve months at Hartridge Monastery has been a period of transition with the arrival of a new abbot. At the end of November 2006 Ajahn Suriyo, who had been abbot for three years, left to live in a hermitage. He had been very popular at Hartridge, but poor health was a steady drain, and sadly, late this year, he decided to disrobe. Ajahn Dhiravamso, originally only in Devon for a few months, extended his stay to take the helm as acting senior monk for an interim period, until in May 2007 Ajahn Jutindharo arrived from Amaravati to take up the position of abbot. These two together with Venerable Mahapanyo from Italy, were the resident bhikkhus for vassa 2007, before the latter returned to Italy and the former went to Chithurst prior to moving on to Bodhinyanarama in Australia.

Helping the continuity at the monastery – as the only person resident for all of 2007 – has been Anagarika Paramito, who first arrived in Devon in October 2006 as a layman, and then took anagarika precepts at Hartridge in April. Latterly he has been joined by Anagarika Chris, who has also lived at Wat Pa Nanachat and at Aruna Ratanagiri.

With a period of waiting before Ajahn Jutindharo arrived, and his taking time to become familiar with a new place, it is perhaps no surprise that the emphasis this year has been about maintaining continuity. Hartridge is a warm and open-hearted environment, supported by the clarity and structure of the monastic form. Support for and interest in the monastery has been steadily growing over the last few years, and there were signs that this will continue. Both Wesak and Kathina festivals were very well attended, meditation workshops are popular and there is a steady stream of guests, visitors, and invitations for teaching and dana.

As well as offering teaching and support for lay groups, practitioners, and a sizeable Buddhist community in the south-west, as a small, friendly monastery, relatively quiet and with kutis, Hartridge naturally appeals to many members of the Sangha. This year has seen quite a few samanas coming for short or longer visits. Many have enjoyed going on pindapat (almsround) in Honiton, a practice maintained over the year by Ajahn Dhiravamso. From late December Venerable Subaddho from Amaravati will have arrived to take up residence, and Ajahn Anando will also be staying for the winter retreat.

As for the monastery itself, over recent years there have been significant improvements made to parts of the main building. Other parts have also been in need of
attention, and so some decorating, repairing and renewing, particularly inside, has left the original cottage in quite good shape. While it is early days yet, we are beginning to look ahead to possibly redeveloping some of the outbuildings to create a larger shrine room and improve the guest facilities, and to rebuild some of the kutis. And we hope to develop plans to plant up more areas of the land owned by the monastery to extend the woodlands planted 15 years ago. Watch this space!

Belated new year’s celebrations at Dhammapala were kick-started in early 2007, when the chairman of the monastery trust informed us that the ‘old Dhammapala’ – the monastery’s former property in the town of Konolfingen near Bern – had finally been sold. This was the place where Ajahn Tiradhammo and a couple of other pioneers started the monastic project in Switzerland in 1988. Since moving the monastery to Kandersteg in 1991 there had been continuing attempts to sell the old property, but without much success. What a relief to know that the monastery is now debt free – since up to now substantial interest on the mortgage for the old property still had to be paid.

In general our small community of five spent a harmonious 2007 together. Ajahn Natthiko, who joined us in August of 2006 from Chithurst, continued his process of integration into the Dhammapala realm, and has become a much-appreciated member of the Sangha both within the monastery and by the wider lay community. This was despite undertaking an ongoing, explicit ‘non-struggle’ with a strange auto-immune disease he’s had since early this year. After various treatments and attempts at diagnoses, the causes for this illness remain mysterious. This heavenly messenger remains a constantly-felt reminder in the background of our lives.

The most steady presence at the monastery this year was ironically Ashin Ottama, who for the first time ever spent the whole of the past year at Dhammapala. Normally his life is divided between a few months of teaching commitments in the Czech Republic and spending the rest of the time with us in the Swiss mountains.

After the quiet and unusually mild winter retreat (with hardly any snowfall – at 1200 meters altitude!) activity in the monastery intensified as summer approached, with many lay and monastic visitors, plus various teaching engagements, and a major renovation project all going on at the same time. It therefore became essential that each member of the community kept their internal resources strong. That can mean some time away from the monastery – as it did for Ajahn Natthiko, Bhante Sukhacitto, Anagarika Robert and myself – but most importantly it concerns the quality and space of the heart at ‘home base’.

We also had outside support during that active period from two long-term visiting monks. U Kaccayana, a Swiss disciple of Pa Auk Sayadaw in Burma, spent a few months on and off with us and Venerable...
Nyanadassano from Amaravati joined us for a month during the spring.

Margrit, our secretary in the monastery office, had been undergoing a gentle metamorphosis into a prospective nun for quite a while, including the clear outer sign of a shaven head. This process led her to a three-month visit to the newly opened German nunnery in Bavaria, Anenja Vihara. Her stay there served as a trial period, to find out if she resonated with the training and teaching offered by the senior nun, Bhikkhuni Mudita, and if life within a female community could provide a realistic option for her. Halfway through her stay it became clear that she would not go forth into the Holy Life just yet, and she returned to Dhammapala towards the end of October to take up her office duties again. In the interim she was replaced by our friend from Ticino, Claudia Bergomi, who handled much of the monastery’s business with competence and a good deal of lightheartedness and humour.

Four times this year we had much-appreciated, extended visits from nuns. Ajahn Thaniya from Chithurst started it off by spending half the winter retreat with us, enjoying the spaciousness of a small community and the mountain environment. Bhikkhuni Visuddhi, from the Czech Republic, followed in June and spent a month with us. She lives with her teacher in Sri Lanka and supports a kindergarten project for Tsunami orphans. Ajahn Metta and Sister Chandasara arrived in July, during our tudong period when most of the community was away. This brought something new. In this predominantly German-speaking part of the country Ajahn Metta was the first German-speaking nun to offer a retreat. The positive feedback spoke for itself and plans are already afoot to hold another such retreat in July 2008. In November, Swiss nun Sr Ariyanyani (a disciple of Sayadaw U Janaka from Burma) came for a month of rest and recuperation. She is quite an active, travelling Dhamma teacher in her own right and she appreciated the supportive space.

Another novelty worth mentioning was the co-teaching of Anagarika Robert – by now a 13 vassa anagarika – in a week-long retreat for lay practitioners titled Mindfulness within stillness and dialogue. Daily small group dialogues were an essential part of this retreat, and they contributed to a steady increase in the quality of silent meditative inquiry as the days went by. The end result felt so encouraging and uplifting that we’re considering holding future retreats in the same style.

Also noteworthy this year was Ajahn Natthiko’s participation in a gathering of transpersonal psychologists in Freiburg, Germany. The title of the conference was Forgiveness and Reconciliation. His contribution consisted of a workshop given from a Buddhist perspective. The meeting was mainly spent in active exploration and featured reports from participants’ own therapeutic work. Particular attention was given to the Holocaust, and how much it is still alive today within the collective psyche of the Western world.

Twice this year we showed our support for the lovely retreat centre in southern France, Le Refuge, and its host Betty Picheloup. Ajahn Natthiko and myself gave a couple of talks and weekend retreats there. The remainder of our outside teaching engagements was limited, so we could focus on life within the monastery and on regular periods of stillness and reflection for ourselves. From April onwards each year Dhammapala offers a schedule of retreats, workshops and talks to various meditation groups, student groups and people from adult education institutions. This annual rhythm of events has made it obvious to us where our priorities must lie; slowly over the years we seem to have learned the lesson.

Within our small community there have always been changes of personnel from time to time, and this year it
concerned Bhante Sukhacitto. After six years at Dhammapala it was time for him to move on to new pastures. His immediate plans are to join the community at Amaravati for the winter retreat and to spend the vassa in 2008 at the Metta Vihara in southern Germany. Our good wishes accompany him on his way.

Our monastery’s rather limited property does not invite huge work projects and alterations anymore – thankfully. But this year a long-held plan finally came to fruition. The front of the monastery had been spruced up with a beautifully laid out natural stone terrace in late 2006. During spring and autumn our friend Berti built a fine wooden porch over it, to serve as the main welcoming area. All that’s left to be put into place are the two wrathful Nepalese Dhammapala (‘Dhamma-guardian’) figures, presently lingering in the monks’ common room, traditionally meant to scare away forces hostile to the Dhamma – and hopefully not the local people! We also gave the Reception Room (the Sala) a thorough facelift with freshly painted walls, a new wall-to-wall carpet and an enhanced shrine arrangement.

As Dhammapala Monastery moves into the 20th year since its foundation, we’re looking back over that time at a striking multitude of people who have either lived here as Sangha members or received teachings and inspiration as guests and visitors. Also many have come through just to abide within the peaceful atmosphere, or simply to offer it something from their hearts. As a resident it’s a privilege to know that one’s contributions to this Dhamma field are widely appreciated and at the same time enriching for one’s own growth in the Dhamma. We are looking forward to this continuing for many years to come.

Ajahn Khemasiri

The year 2007 seems to have been a particularly busy one, with lots of coming and going, plus teaching visits to various parts of Italy – Bari, Cagliari, Milan, Padua, Piacenza, Rieti, Verona - and to Slovenia. Guests come from all over Europe, and beyond, and at present there are several young men, Italian as well as Spanish and Slovenian, interested in undertaking a monastic training. After spending a year with us, Ajahn Uttamo left for Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand, while we were joined by Ajahn Jantee from Wat Pah Pong and Tan Nyanadassano from Amaravati. Ajahn Suvaco and Tan Mahapanyo went to spend the vassa in England, at Aruna Ratanagiri and Hartridge respectively, and have since returned, while Tan Hiriko returned to Ratanagiri after spending the summer months here. For the winter retreat this leaves us with six bhikkhus, one samanera, one anagarika and several lay residents.

The Kathina ceremony marked the 10th anniversary of our arrival in the Sabina hills, and was the biggest event we’ve so far hosted. We were very pleased to have as special guests Luang Por Sumedho, and Ajahn Jayasaro who came especially all the way from Bangkok accompanied by a contingent of about 20 Thai people. A fund-raising concert had been held in Bangkok, with the participation of well-known musicians and singers, the proceeds being donated towards Santacittarama’s temple project. A very substantial sum was raised for which we express our anumodana. Another major event this year was Songkran, South-East Asia’s new year celebrations in April, which also saw a group

Santacittarama (Italy)

Santacittarama: The main building
of generous supporters coming from Thailand, bringing with them the elderly and delightful Tan Chao Khun Dhamnamoli, the head monk of Surin province.

Several meetings have been held to discuss the temple project and, although we still do not have building permission, at least several possible (and legal!) ways of overcoming the bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining this have opened up. In the meantime a contract has been signed to rebuild the men’s guest house, which should be completed next spring.

This year at Bodhinyanarama has been one of many changes.

At the beginning of the year we were four resident ajahns, and during the summer we were pleased to have visits by four senior ajahns from further afield: Ajahn Munindo, Ajahn Guttasilo, Ajahn Vajiro and Ajahn Chandako.

However, by the end of May I was the only ajahn left to continue with our increased teaching programme! Ajahn Dhammanando returned to the UK in April, Ajahn Ariyasilo stayed the vassa in Melbourne before returning to the UK and Bhante Jinalankara began his year retreat at the ‘Bhavana Kuti’, a half-hour drive across the valley.

However, our small community was soon reinforced with the arrival of Ven. Gavesako in July and Ajahn Uttamo in August. The increase in the resident Sangha allowed us each to have a much-appreciated six week period of silent retreat during the vassa.

For ten weeks of the vassa period we were fortunate to have the support of two dedicated and very supportive meditators. Not only were they exceptionally helpful in the kitchen, thus giving Samanera Nandako and Anagarika Horst time out for retreat, they were also very active in transforming our garden area and assisting in forest work. Several of us were able to benefit from their extensive knowledge of native New Zealand flora and are now able to identify at least some of the diverse plant life in our lush forest.

Fortunately, we have no urgent projects so most active meditation is involved with the continuous maintenance of the forest paths and weed control, with 1 ½ hours each morning devoted to this peaceful and vigorous work. We have reintroduced one of the memorable regular activities of the Thai forest monasteries – sweeping leaves.

The new kitchen project is slowly proceeding with architectural plans reaching a recognizable stage and a miniature model on display. A number of supporters have made very generous donations and others have started various fund-raising endeavours. Generally there has been an outflow of keen and encouraging support.

Bodhinyanarama is extremely well laid out for use by both the monastic community and lay visitors. It thus lends itself to the holding of meditation retreats with a
minimum of disturbance for the monastic Sangha. Thus I have increased the number of short-term retreats together with a monthly Meditation Afternoon. The afternoons have been very well attended and the retreats are slowly beginning to be appreciated by more people from further afield.

During the Rains Retreat I gave a series of talks on the theme of the Seven Factors of Awakening which was very well received. So well, in fact, that several supporters are helping to transcribe them for a possible book.

Due to having only one other ajahn here I have stayed close to home, except for a short teaching trip to Christchurch. However next year plans are afoot to travel to Thailand for the annual January 16th Sangha gathering at Wat Pah Pong, and to Australia for a weekend of teaching in Sydney. In April begins the long journey to Japan, Europe and North America.

And so the theme of ongoing change continues. At the end of the Rains Retreat Samanera Nandako returned to lay life to pursue his interest for more solitude. In December we will be joined by Ven. Narado from Chithurst Monastery, and then at the end of January Ven. Gavesako departs for Thailand.

Of course, all these external changes are only an ongoing display of the truth of eternal change.

With metta, Ajahn Tiradhammo

Abhayagiri enjoyed a spacious and joyous year blessed with many distinguished visitors and ample opportunity for cultivation. Over the three-month winter retreat, Ajahn Amaro read out the entire English language collection of Luang Por Chah’s teachings, ending with selected readings of Ajahn Sumedho. This set the tone for the year to come.

We celebrated six ordinations in the Abhayagiri community this year. In April and July, respectively, Tan Thitabho and Tan Kassapo received upasampada, becoming the newest bhikkhus. Anagarika Lee Mintz went forth to become Samanera Cunda in April, while Anagarika Whit Meyers followed along in October to become Samanera Kaccana. In June the community welcomed Anagarika Nic Grueff and in July Anagarika Michael Bodman to the white-robed training.

In April, Ajahn Pasanno returned from his fifteen-month sabbatical in Thailand, stopping off to visit branch monasteries in New Zealand and Australia along the way. The community is delighted to have him back. Tan Caganando, an American monk who was at Wat Pah Nanachat, also joined us at Abhayagiri in April. Tan Ahimsako returned from Great Britain in June, after residing at Amaravati for his third year as a bhikkhu. Lay resident Jackie Miller also returned to manage Casa Serena, the women’s guest house, after having spent the winter in England. Tan Khemaratana, an American monk from the Bhavana Society in West Virginia, joined us for the vassa.

Just before the start of the Rains Retreat, Tan Jotipalo travelled to the Midwest to meet up with Father William Skudlarek, a Benedictine monk from St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota. The two monks undertook an interfaith walking pilgrimage up the Mississippi River in northern Minnesota, covering about 85 miles in eight days along the Paul Bunyan Bike Trail. The walkers received positive press and enthusiastic support from the locals.

The community began the vassa with a two-week period of group practice and then took two-week solitary retreats in turn. This year’s Vinaya classes were led by Tan Jotipalo, who taught the rules by incorporating scenarios that called for everyone’s interaction. As a gesture of gratitude, this year’s Kathina robe was offered to him.

Ajahn Sudanto and Tan Karonadhammo, at the invitation of Portland Friends of the Dhamma, observed the
vassa in a beautiful and remote setting near Mosier, Oregon, close to the Columbia River Gorge. Tenting on friends’ land, they were very generously maintained by lay supporters in Oregon. This summer marks the completion of the tenth vassa for (now) Ajahn Karunadhammo – the first completely ‘home-grown’ Abhayagiri monk to reach ten Rains.

It is also with great appreciation that we mark the completion of the tenth vassa at Abhayagiri of our longest lay resident and Sangha protector, Debbie Stamp. An original member and still on the board of the Sanghapala Foundation (19 years!), and supreme multi-tasking dynamo; she still manages to connect with residents and guests alike with warmth, kindness, and good humour.

The end of the vassa brought a number of changes to the community. Tan Jotipalo departed for Arrow River Forest Hermitage in Thunder Bay, Canada, for an extended period. At the time of this writing, Tan Ñaniko, having just finished his fifth Rains, is away in India until the end of the year. Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Karunadhammo are preparing for a visit to Thailand. From there, Ajahn Pasanno will lead a group on pilgrimage in India, before returning to Abhayagiri on Boxing Day.

Abhayagiri received many distinguished visitors this year. In April, Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi paid a visit and kindly extended his stay to deliver the address at the ordinations of Tan Thitabho and Samanera Cunda. Ajahn Dton, the vice-abbot of Ajahn Tui’s monastery in Nong Khai, Thailand, visited briefly. Ajahn Sucitto came to stay with us for a week at the end of May while on a teaching tour of North America. He delivered the full moon desana (Dhamma talk) on Vesakha Puja.

Ajahn Dick Silaratano came to visit in June. A senior Western disciple of Luang Da Maha Boowa, Ajahn Dick has lived in Thailand for the past 30 years and he shared reflections of his living and training with Tan Ajahn Maha Boowa over that time. Joseph Kappell (ex-Ajahn Pabhakaro) also visited in June. We enjoyed hearing stories about the ‘early days’ with Luang Por Chah.

In June we were truly blessed to receive Ajahn Plien Paññapatipo, a highly revered Thai forest ajahn, for a two-week stay. During his visit, Luang Por Plien tirelessly offered Dhamma teachings every evening, lasting into the late hours of the night and sometimes the wee hours of the morning. Ajahn Pasanno provided the translation, which required awesome focus and endurance. Tan Moshe, a Thai monk from Wat Pah Nanachat, served as Luang Por’s attendant during his travels in America. Ajahn Piyasilo, on his way back to Chiang Rai after spending a year at Cittaviveka Monastery, visited us during the time of Luang Por Plien’s visit, as did Maechee Mon, who was ordained with Ajahn Sona at Birken Monastery in British Columbia.
Reverend Master Seikai of Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple (a branch of Shasta Abbey) joined us for a two-week stay in August. In September, we were fortunate to receive Ajahn Thanissaro, the abbot of Metta Forest Monastery in San Diego County, for a six-day visit.

Ajahn Sundara paid us a brief visit on her way to Cloud Mountain Meditation Center in Washington, where she spent the vassa this year. Ruth Denison also visited briefly in October. Ruth, an early Dhamma pioneer in the U.S., has been a supporter and friend of Abhayagiri for many years. At the time of this writing (November, 2007), Ajahn Metta and Sister Jotipanya, accompanied by Anagarika Santussika, are scheduled to arrive from England for a visit of several weeks. Ajahn Metta will be co-leading the annual Thanksgiving Retreat along with Ajahn Amaro.

In addition to the teachings offered by our many guests, the Abhayagiri monastic community had a full schedule of teachings and events. These included the ongoing Upasika program, which brings together lay practitioners who have made a long-term commitment to spiritual practice; monthly talks in Berkeley and Ukiah; and the annual Spirit Rock Teen Weekend. The sixth annual Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage rolled up the driveway in September, with about 90 riders pedalling 140 miles over two days from Spirit Rock.

Ever responding to the call for Dhamma teachings, Ajahn Amaro travelled far and wide (as well as near) conducting teachings for groups in Michigan, at the Insight Meditation Society and Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Massachusetts (along with Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia and Ajahn Punnadhammo), at the Sati Center in Redwood City (with Joe Bobrow Roshi), at the Great Vow Zen Monastery in Oregon, at the annual Family Retreat at Spirit Rock, and for students in Wisconsin.

For something a little different, six members of the Sangha attended a four-day ‘welding workshop’, hosted by expert welder/artist Richard Yaski in nearby Little River. In addition to morning meditation, the midday meal and a Dhamma talk one evening, the group learned and practised the welder’s art throughout the day.

The community built a beautiful new shrine house to shelter the golden Buddha statue that presides over the cloister compound. Final touches were put on a new ‘day-use meditation platform’ for women, sponsored by Ruth Denison, providing a secluded space for sitting and walking meditation.

As the blaze of summer fades from the mind and dark clouds shape-shift overhead with increasing frequency, we go about the routine of samanas – living simply and in harmony with the inside and outside conditions, as they are.

Glossary — Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter

Please note: Due to typographical limitations, Pali diacritics have been omitted throughout the newsletter. 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.
anumodana: An appreciative acknowledgement of goodness done.
bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk / bhikkhuni: A Buddhist nun
Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.
Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
kathina: An almsgiving ceremony at the end of the vassa.
kuti: A hut; a small dwelling for meditation, usually in the forest.
Luang Por (Thai): A title of affectionate respect (lit. “Venerable Father”).
metta: loving-kindness
puja: devotional observances such as chanting and offering incense.
samana: One who has entered the Holy life; religious recluse or wanderer.
samanera: A novice monk.
Sangha: The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns.
sasana: The dispensation of the Buddha’s teaching.
siladhara: A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.
Tan (Thai): A common title of respect.
tudong: austere contemplative wandering, relying on faith and meditation.
vassa: The three-month summer “Rains Retreat”; a mark of how many years (“vassas”) a monk or nun has been in robes.
vihara: A monastic dwelling.
Vinaya: The monastic discipline.
## Sangha

### Winter Retreat

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 can 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 April.

## Amaravati

### Lay resident opportunities

**Site caretaker & gardener**

Spaces may still be available for two lay residents at Amaravati, as caretaker or gardener. If you have reasonable maintenance skills and an interest to live and practise with the monastic community as site caretaker for a year or more; or if you have gardening skills and an interest to live and practise with the monastic community as site gardener for up to a year or more, please apply to the Amaravati Secretary.

**Kitchen coordinator**

A similar opportunity may be available from June 2008, for someone to manage the kitchen.

### Family events

**Rainbows Weekend:** May 2–5th

**June Weekend:** June 27–29th

**Family Camp:** August 16–25th

To book for these three events please contact:

David Lillywhite
147 Whyteladyes Lane, Cookham, Berkshire, SL6 9LF, UK – Tel: (+44) (0)1628 810 083
email: daddydavid at talktalk dot net

**Young Person Retreat:** November 21–23rd

**Creative Retreat:** December 19–21st

Booking forms and further information about these and all family events can be downloaded from [www.family.amaravati.org](http://www.family.amaravati.org) or contact: familyevents at amaravati dot org

### Amaravati lay events 2008

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 (DoP)** – no need to book 9.45am for 10–5pm (Please bring food to share)

**Retreats** – advanced booking essential 5:30pm Fri. – 4pm on the last day.

### Sangha Walks

**Return to the long road**

Next year is the 25th anniversary of the walk made by Ajahn Amaro and Nick Scott from Chithurst to Harham, an account of which was published in *A Long Road North*, Ajahn Amaro and Nick intend to repeat some of the walk next year and would like to revisit anyone they met on the original walk. They are also open to invitations from anyone living on the route who would like them to stop by. Please write to Nick Scott at nickscott at amaravati dot org.

**Walking retreats in Crete**

*Ajahn Karuniko and Nick Scott*

### ARUNA RATANAGIRI

**Auditor**

The Trustees of Harnham Monastery are looking for a volunteer chartered accountant to audit the trusts accounts once a year. If you are interested, please contact the monastery on (01661) 881 612 or by email at sangha at ratanagiri dot org.uk

**Caretaker/guest house manager**

At Aruna Ratanagiri we are looking for a new caretaker / guest house manager. Applicants need to be male, fluent in English, comfortably familiar with Theravada Buddhist monastic practice, and able with general repair work. Also, they will need to have a clean driver’s licence and be able to commit for at least one year. The caretaker will receive without charge: a single room, two meals a day, the opportunity to participate in retreats and the opportunity to participate in daily meditations. Email us from our contact page on [www.ratanagiri.org.uk](http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk) or phone us on (0166) 188 1612.

### Wesak 2008

Wesak celebrations at Harnham will take place on the 18th of May, starting at 10am.

### Retreats

With the new Kusala Guest House functioning we are now able to offer more retreats at Harnham. For information and booking please visit [www.kusalahouse.org](http://www.kusalahouse.org)

### Kusala House Retreats 2008

**Women’s Retreat** May 2–5th

A retreat for women will be offered from 2–5th May. Led by Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta from Amaravati. *FULLY BOOKED*

**Men’s Retreat** May 25–31st

A retreat for men will be offered from 25–31st May. Led by Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Abhinando. Volunteers for cooking are needed.

**Weekend Retreat** July 4–6th

A weekend retreat will be offered from 4–6th July. Led by Ajahn Jayanto.

**Summer Retreat** August 3–9th

A summer retreat will be offered from 3rd–9th August. Led by Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Abhinando.

**Women’s Retreat** Sept 26–30th

A retreat for women will be offered from 26th–30th September. Led by Ajahn Candasiri.

For information and booking for all retreats please contact Kath Ann Jones at: kusalaretreats08 at gmail dot com or by phone at 0120 7283361
INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

Workshops at AMARAVATI
Saturday afternoons 2–4 p.m.

Meditation instruction for beginners, with an opportunity for questions and dialogue
Feel free to come along — no booking is necessary
Classes are in the Bodhinyana Meditation Hall

Tropical Meditation and Dhamma Centre
Cookham, nr. Maidenhead
Berkshire, SL6 2DH
Tel: 01628 810083
Fax: 01628 810084
E-mail: info@tropicalcentre.org.uk
Website: www.bodhinyana.org.uk

Much more can be found on the various monastery and Dhamma websites linked at www.forestsangha.org

Outsiders may be interested in attending the following: 20-22 June Thai Weekend
23–25 May Weekend Ajahn Anando
9–18 May 10 Days Luang Por Sumedho
25–29 April 5 Days Ajahn Ariyasilo
18–20 April Weekend Ajahn Gandhasilo

Generals Guidelines
All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners. It is advisable to do a weekend retreat before doing a longer retreat. Due to high demand:
- There will be a limit of three retreats per person per year;
- Places for Ajahn Sumedho’s retreats will have been allocated by lottery at the end of 2007, with priority given to people who have taken part in his retreats during the last two years.

Booking Procedure
Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form, which can be obtained by:
- Downloading from the website;
- Emailing or writing to the Retreat Centre.

Please note that bookings cannot be made over the telephone.

Start and Finish Times
Registration is from 16.00 – 19.00 on the first day of the retreat. The orientation talk is at 19.15. Weekend retreats end at 16.00, longer retreats at lunchtime. Attendance is expected for the whole retreat.

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Tel: +61 (0) 395 665 999
Fax: +61 (0) 395 665 998

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18–20 Nanson Way, Nollamara 6061 WA
Tel: +61 (0) 9344 4220
www.bswna.org.au
Stewards: Buddhist Society of Western Australia

Santi Forest Monastery
Lot 6 Coalmines Road, PO Box 132 Bundanoon,
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Tel: +61 (02) 4883 6331
Fax: +61 (02) 8572 8286
http://santifm1.0.googlegroups.com
santioffice@gmail.com

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Tisarana Buddhist Monastery
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Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca

Stewards: Tisarana Buddhist Monastery

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www.watpahnanachat.org

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Abhayagiri Monastery
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Fax: +1 (707) 485 7948
www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapala Foundation

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Bodhindayanarama Monastery
17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019,
tel: +64 (04) 563 7193
www.bodhindayanarama.net.nz
Stewards: Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association

Vimutti Monastery
PO Box 7
Bombay 2343
+64 (012) 563 6816
vimutti.atba@gmail.com
www.vimutti.org.nz
Stewards: Auckland Theravada Buddhist Association

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