The end of the world is here

2 Newsletter
3 Images
4 The end of the world
8 When everything is said
12 Dhamma from Upasika Kee
17 Grapevine
These days it’s easy to worry about the world.
But what is the world? The Buddha’s approach was not to believe in the perceptions and views we hold, but to look into what it is we actually experience. We can learn to see what the world, as we experience it in the present moment, is made of. Our perceptions, our assumptions, ideas, feelings and sensations – whatever the relative truth of the picture of the world they provide us, all these can also be seen just for what they are: the fundamental experience of form, of feeling, perception, mental fabrication, sensory consciousness happening right now. The world can be seen for what it is, not something ‘out there’ within which we live (that’s an idea in the mind), but as physical and mental processes we are experiencing in awareness.

The end of the world is here, as Luang Por Chah told Ajahn Sumedho, who in his Dhamma Talk points out that practising to recognize this truth is the purpose of Sangha life; for it is in the relinquishment of our habitually grasping relationship to this ‘world’ that the end of suffering is realized. That may be essentially simple but it’s so subtle and deeply rooted we need to fully dedicate ourselves to this practice, which goes against usual social values based on self-identity and attainment. As Upasika Kee Nanayon makes clear in her teaching, it is necessary to still the mind through practice, abandon what we are grasping, and pursue and investigate this matter ourselves.

There are poems and drawings in this issue as well, the sharing of various images. Ajahn Abhinando has recently had published a book of his poetry in English and German, called When Everything Is Said / Wenn Alles Gesagt Ist, which is available online. Hard copies (in limited numbers) are also available for those interested: please contact your local monastery.

With all best wishes,
Bhikkhu Jayanto

North American Readers
Last year we discontinued the previous system of distributing the Forest Sangha Newsletter through the mail, encouraging readers in North America to either download or read the newsletter online, or to contact Amaravati Monastery to ask to be put on the mailing list for a hard copy to be posted to you from the U.K.

We have, however, discovered a glitch in our mailing list record-keeping and now aren’t sure if we have all the addresses of those of you living in North America who have specifically asked us to send you the FSN.

If this has affected you, please accept our apologies and let us know again that you would like to receive the FSN through international post.

Thanks!
Will o’ the Wisp

Through the crack in personality enters something tender:

a dark angel deals the cards, building a prison from light.
Faces flap like transparent flags.
Bright candles, white tulips, dark room.
Emptiness towers in the cathedrals.
A tree groans inside the soul.
Outside the world belongs to passers-by.
Inside we are not bothered.

The brain-muscle simulates a cramp, an empty line expanding:

on the pathways of silence, behind history’s back, at the abyss of a concluded thought

the smile of sleeping shepherds is tending the stars.

Meditation and Riposte

Meditation

Everything moves, and yet, out of the shimmering rises a silence.

If you step through this mirror you will stand vanished in the flowering room.

Riposte

Falling asleep I walk into the wrong room without knocking.
It is dark.

Waking up I step back into my body.

Poems by Bhikkhu Abhinando
Drawings by Bhikkhu Thitadhammo
Today is the new moon, halfway through the Vassa ... time flies. At my age it goes by faster than ever before. But time is an illusion. We’re talking about Dhamma, akalika (timeless) Dhamma, the timeless reality. I like to use the word ‘reality’ for Dhamma. I say it this way for the purpose of reflection (awareness and investigation), to take words and give them more meaning, more power than the English words we already know. Usually the word ‘reality’, as in ‘let’s face reality’, refers to worldly problems. But the ‘real world’ of society is not real. I’m not trying to be doctrinal about this, just to get us to reflect on the word Dhamma. Taking refuge in the Dhamma is taking refuge in reality.

As we practise mindfulness meditation we need to use these Four Noble Truths. The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta we chanted tonight is a perfect tool. That is, if we use it for insight, not just memorize and be able to chant it but use it like a tool: apply it to our experience, to suffering, the causes, the cessation and the way of non-suffering. The Buddha even made it simpler than the Four Noble Truths: he said “I teach only two things, suffering and the end of suffering.” Notice he’s taking an ordinary human experience, suffering, or dukkha, and just pointing to it. He’s not making metaphysical statements that the nature of reality is suffering and the real world is all about being miserable. It’s about two things: suffering and the end of suffering.

So the end of suffering is here – I’m pointing to my heart, or citta, as they call it in Thailand. Luang Por Chah used to say ‘Suffering ends here’, and he’d point to his heart. Or, ‘The end of the world is here’.

We can feel intimidated, being samanas, because oftentimes we’re criticized for not living in the ‘real world’ with its struggles and so on, that we live in some kind of illusory world. But as you know, that is not the real world. It is the world, though. The world is like that, the nature of conditioned phenomena is that it is changing, unstable, uncertain.

Seeing it that way is a reflection, a way to use our awareness to point to conditioned phenomena, which we call the five khandhas*. In the teachings we have this neat little package called the five khandhas to work with. That simplifies everything, because conditioned phenomena are endless in their variety. The human body is a condition, it’s a phenomenon. This is where we start looking at our own body no longer from the perspective of cultural attitudes or memories, but in this very direct way: rupa khandha (form) is this. It doesn’t have to be a matter of looking at somebody else’s rupa khandha, there’s one right here I experience all the time. This kind of reflection involves changing from personal pronouns, identities of any sort, and just noticing a condition, a phenomenon that I am experiencing at this moment: this rupa khandha. And it’s like this. The five khandhas provide expedient ways to investigate phenomena, both from the coarse level of physical form to the refinements of feeling and consciousness, memory, emotion and the whole range of conditioned phenomena we experience.

As always, for this Vassa there’s this encouragement to keep investigating your experience in these ways. Whatever happens doesn’t matter, the weather or the problems or whatever the conditions are. We can make them into problems and get worried and upset and sad and so forth because the conditions aren’t always what we want. We want certain conditions, we don’t want other conditions. That’s about conditions. But what I’m pointing to is a way of reflecting on conditioned phenomena.

*The five khandhas, or groups, are physical and mental components of the personality and of sensory experience in general. They are: rupa (physical phenomena), vedana (feeling), sañña (perception), sankhara (mental fashionings), and viññana (sense consciousness).
phenomena, of observing them, in which we’re no longer trying to make anything out of them but just recognizing them. The reality of conditioned phenomena is that they are impersonal, and they are changing. No matter how strongly we feel our emotions are ours, they’re empty. The feeling, ‘I’m hurt because I’m not appreciated’ is an empty condition. It has no soul, no core, no substance, no essence. When you investigate from this level of awareness, seeing it as empty is not to dismiss or deny it – that would be some kind of value judgement we’d put on it. Instead, it’s just recognizing the feeling as the feeling; it’s consciousness awakened to Dhamma, to reality. Simple as that.

We all know this teaching. Most of us have been at it for years, using this formula. These Pali teachings are skilful means to investigate reality; to break through the illusions, the delusions, the conditioning, the attachment to conditioned phenomena. Everything, every condition, whether it’s happiness or unhappiness, takes us to the unconditioned – if you just let it. Whether you’re happy or sad, you get what you want or you don’t – everything; it’s all conditions arising, ceasing. It all ceases in the unconditioned.

Anata-dhamma is reality. And the relationship of anata-dhamma, or the unconditioned, to the conditioned is not one of judging. Everything, every condition is born and ceases in the unconditioned. It’s not saying the conditioned is inferior to the unconditioned; that’s the way the thinking mind works. Using these terms is not to take sides: ‘I’m for the unconditioned, I can’t be bothered with the conditioned’. It’s to be able to know, to discern the conditioned for what it is and to recognize the real. It’s extraordinarily simple. Or maybe it’s just ordinarily simple. Extraordinary is an extreme isn’t it? But you get my point: the simplicity of it.

Notice that personality is a complicated thing. My personality tends to make everything complicated. I’ve watched it for years, watched how the moment I get caught in my feelings and desires, loves and hates, preferences, opinions and views … the world arises. And it’s a complicated world, full of fears and complaints and disappointments.

The emotional state seems more real than anything else, doesn’t it, when we’re caught up with our feelings. It takes us over, we can be completely enslaved to our emotions. And that’s where this vedana, sañña, sankhara, the khandhas of feeling, perception and formations can be used to observe. Notice how we can be aware of all that, of happiness and unhappiness, of me and mine. Of my feelings and what I think and what I want.

That which is aware of me is not me. Now this statement is not meant to be grasped as some kind of doctrinal teaching, it’s an encouragement to investigate. Find out: this which is aware, it’s pure, conscious, discerning … but ‘me’ depends on thinking. To become a person, to become me I have to think ‘me’. If you just keep examining, investigating in this way, the whole illusory structure, attachment to conditioned phenomena begins to fall away, is no longer believable, no longer convincing. Because it is illusory. There’s no essence to it, any of the five khandhas, there’s no personal essence or substance or core or soul or special thing that is just mine. The Buddha is the knowing, the ability we all have to know reality. Thinking is a human creation that we cling to. We’re attached to our thoughts, views and perceptions. Our memories. These are very convincing, because this me, me, me can really take us over. Me as a person, me as a man, me as an American, me as 74 years old, me as a bhikkhu … and yet me is empty.

When you observe in this way, that which is observing this sense of me isn’t judging it – it’s not saying it’s wrong to think me – but it knows, there’s a discern-
ment, a recognition that if I attach to this and follow this sense of me and mine, where does it take me? To suffering, every time. Complicated, endless problems, difficult scenes, fears, resentment, disappointments.

I came into monastic life very idealistic about Buddhism, monastic life and the Thai forest tradition. But every convention has disappointed me in some way or another. This is the nature of conditions, isn’t it? They’re all disappointing. Even when I get what I want, it’s not enough. It’s not a criticism of the convention, just a recognition of what idealism can do, what we bring into this life and why so many people leave it. Because it’s disappointing on the ‘me’ level. I don’t get what ‘I’ want from it, from the ego level.

It wasn’t what I was expecting. I wanted something else. But then the whole point of these Four Noble Truths is to see the nature of wanting. Wanting something you don’t have or not wanting things to be the way they are – blind attachment always takes you to suffering. That is not to be believed in, it’s to be investigated. To be seen for yourself, known for yourself. No one else can make us enlightened or know reality for us. But they can point to it: that’s what the Buddha’s teachings do, they’re pointers at reality.

Life is short. Don’t waste your life when you have the opportunity to use this experience, this birth, this rupa khandha, this personality that you have, the loves and hates and feelings, the five khandhas and six ayatanas (sense organs) that you’re experiencing right now, to use them for awakened discernment. We’re not here to try to make things nice and what we want. This is the challenge of the samana life.

As Buddhist monks and nuns we are samanas, alms mendicants, meaning that we’re putting ourselves right on the line, depending on the goodwill of other people. That’s different than if we were priests with rights to control or dominate the lay community. Remember, as alms mendicants we’re actually beggars. We put ourselves at the very bottom of society’s ladder. We have no money, we can’t even grow our own food – for food, shelter, something to wear, medicine, we are totally dependent on the goodwill and kindness of the lay community. It’s not to take this in a personal way; I’m not saying that we’re so pure and good that we do this. But this is a daring thing to do, isn’t it? It’s putting our life on the line. It’s taking a risk. Better to have money in the bank, own our house, make sure we’re treated properly and appreciated and things are safe and secure. But reflect on what an alms mendicant is. It’s putting ourselves right on the edge.

How many will stay here when the economy falls apart, and take a risk? We take so much for granted here, it’s a well-supported monastery. But the support of this monastery is from the goodwill of a lay community in an affluent country. In some ways it spoils us. We can begin to just take it for granted and forget that sense of gratitude, that kataññu. We can start thinking of what ‘I’ want in a worldly way. The nature of this alms mendicant life is insecurity. We give up our rights. We have moral rights: the Five Precepts, or the Eight or the Ten or the Vinaya. We have the right to determine to live within these restraints on behaviour and speech, within an agreed conventional structure. It’s more about duties than rights, performing one’s duties within the structure of the Vinaya. At least that’s the agreement, that’s how we play this game, in order not to create any more illusions about self or the world, but to break through the illusions. The samana life is about relinquishing, just as the Second Noble Truth is about letting go of desire. It’s not a rejection of anything, it’s not suicide, not resistance, denial or suppression – it’s letting go. It’s releasing our habitual blind hold on the five khandhas. The life of a samana is about relinquishment, not about attaining. We trust in the Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha.

This is just to point out that our life here is not about the social values of today. It is about liberation from delusion, wakening to the real. The real is not something, is not anything. It’s not a phenomenon. You can’t think about it, you can’t create an image of it. So we say unconditioned, unborn, uncreated, unformed. Anatta (not-self), nirodha (cessation), nibbana (liberation). If you try to think about these words you don’t get anywhere. Your mind stops, it’s like nothing. That’s why it can be disappointing, because if we’re expecting something from the meditation practice, some kind of Enlightenment or bright lights and world-trembling experiences and we don’t get them, then we’re disappointed. Because expecting is another kind of desire, isn’t it? I want something. I read about it in a book: the universe trembled when the Buddha was enlightened.
So we’re sitting there waiting for some kind of earth-shaking experience … and even if we get something like that it doesn’t mean anything until we’ve actually penetrated reality with wisdom. And reality is not shaking, it’s not trembling; but it’s here and now, it is reality. It’s real. It’s knowable, recognizable.

So we can use these words, the Third Noble Truth is about ‘realizing’ or ‘recognizing’ the unconditioned. Because when dukkha ceases it isn’t like annihilation, but there is this, there’s reality. When dukkha ceases there’s reality. When we’ve let go of dukkha, let go of the five khandhas then their nature is to cease and there is still the real when conditions cease. If we don’t appreciate this then even though conditions are ceasing all the time we don’t notice because we’re always looking for something else. We’re always on to the next rebirth experience, the next cause, the next problem. Something more to do, something to get, that maybe we should meditate more or we shouldn’t meditate … there are all kinds of views and opinions.

There’s a lot of interest in Advaita Vedanta these days. Because in Advaita you don’t have to deal with Vinaya. According to the Advaita teachers it’s all about being mindful. It’s inspiring, and Vinaya is not mentioned, and even religious conventions are unnecessary. This can be appealing. But what I’ve learned from our style, this very orthodox Theravada Buddhist tradition, the Dhamma-vinaya, is that it gives us forms to work with, to bounce off of, it gives us boundaries where our ego is challenged. Living within its boundaries we might resist or not like it or get attached to the boundaries; we begin to see that one can rebel against or one can get institutionalized through the convention. But the point is to use it consciously as a tool to reflect, to investigate the nature of dukkha.

As such the Dhamma teachings of the Buddha in the Pali Canon are brilliant. We have these skilful tools to use like paticca samuppada (dependent origination), or the Four Noble Truths; the fetters and the stages, and lists like the indriya (mental factors) are brilliant ways of using conventional teachings not for grasping or rejection but for looking at things in different ways, emphasizing them so we can investigate and see. And it gives us a common vocabulary for discussing Dhamma, for sharing this opportunity for liberating insight with others. That’s why the Buddha-Dhamma has been able to last for so long, 2,551 years: because there’s a convention that carries it. One that can be inherited, and go from one generation to the next. The Buddhist teaching has been preserved in its purity. The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta – you can’t get better than that in its skillfulness and precision, just on a conventional level of using investigation to awaken. It’s about taking something so ordinary – suffering – and through investigation seeing its causes and cessation, and realizing non-suffering.

This realm that we’re in is a frustrating experience. Being born as a human being on this planet is like this. It’s not about being peaceful and happy and blissful. It’s about growing old, getting sick, seeing the world change, having to put up with all kinds of fears and ignorance, conflict, unfairness and so on. This is the world, the sense world: it’s about birth and death. But through practice our relationship to the world becomes one of just knowing it – not being born into it moment after moment again and again. Lokavidu (an epithet for the Buddha) means ‘knower of the world’.

At Amaravati, this practice is what we’re here for. It’s all I care about. It’s what I know from experience is right, good, liberating. We can explore, investigate, begin to really understand the nature of the mind, the nature of consciousness. Not through what psychologists or modern science tells us; we’ve got the perfect tools within the Pali Canon for investigating the nature of the mind.

This is the purpose of Amaravati Monastery. It’s a wonderful opportunity. It’s for awakened investigation of Dhamma. We’re not here to feel comfortable and safe; it’s taking a risk, putting ourselves on the edge. This monastery is well supported – I don’t go out and ask people to support it. I don’t go around trying to convert people. It generates its own support because of the Dhamma. It’s the accumulated virtues of the Buddha and his teaching that we are experiencing now. Reflecting on that can help us really value this opportunity.

Luang Por Sumedho
Rain Clears the eye of the night.
Shadows disintegrate in space.

A servant of the unknown desire
dresses up as a landscape
for your next dream.

A dream with a secret compartment:
in a hollow tree
a message awaits you every day.

So far you still don’t bother
to notice.

More Light
in sleeping air.

The world condenses
into a shrine.

I am settled through love
for the quieter gesture.

The poems on these pages are by
Ajahn Abhinando, taken from the book When
Everything Is Said / Wenn Alles Gesagt Ist.
You can find this online at
www.ratanagiri.org.uk/books.htm

The drawings are by Ajahn Thitadhammo, who,
over the years and upon whatever materials have
been at hand (discarded old books, notebook paper
etc.) has sketched, doodled and drawn with much
sensitivity and skill … while on walking pilgrim-
ages through the English countryside and in
residence at Cittaviveka.
The Axle

Clouds hang like dirt in the sky.
Memories whirl like torn pictures
in a ventilation shaft.

I turn off the lights
and drink the last light of the day,
feeling the thirst of the rising night.

My weight shifts
into the centre.
A dark love covers my face.

Outside and inside turn
around my axle
until my axle breaks.

Hungerbird

It is a slow-burning pain:
a fuse.

The heart beats in circles and grows
in every direction.
The hungerbird collects horizons
for his nest.

At Home

The sea has no songs;
the wind does not remember you;
the moon does not understand
anything.

Your fear and your aversion too
are perfectly fine.

If you cry or you don’t,
doesn’t matter.

Just leave it –
we are at home
already.
White Smoke in the fields. In the bundled wreckage glow and clamour united.

Our sacrifice has lured fear out of its ambush.

Everything resounds like the space inside a swinging bell.

A church door sketched while on walking pilgrimage

Unique perspectives of Chithurst House, Cittaviveka Monastery
All is Well

What Burns, burns out:
A feeling flaps its wings
in my shrine,
the metaphysical stomach.

As the alluring call fades,
my hand
opens:
I receive the pain.

Here,
where you are missing,
a sweetness listens
like simmering honey,
melting from the inside
my song,
my gesture,
my pretext for being.

Then the measureless eye looks in on your time
and pulls you down.
Your worries, ideas and plans drift
away on the surface.

Your life bends around the gravity
of the sinking heart;
beginning and end find each other
in a closed sphere.

Your boundaries dissolve.
Warm, red light closes in.

Thoughts still enter sporadically,
screaming ‘Here! Here! Here!’
and crash
like shot-down angels into the sea.
Then everything goes quiet.

The one-eyed night
is squinting at you.
You give her
a bodyless smile:

All is well.

Harnham Hill – at the end of a long walking pilgrimage through the English countryside
Maechee

One of the nuns staying at Amaravati this Vassa is visiting from Thailand, where she has been practicing in nunneries for some years. While she would rather her name is not published, Maechee (which means ‘nun’ in Thai) as we shall call her, agreed to share some of her experiences with the FSN.

Maechee was born in Rajburi Province, not far from one of the most well-known nuns’ communities in Thailand, the nunnery of Upasika Kee Nanayon, a much revered practitioner and teacher of Dhamma. While Upasika Kee herself had passed away in 1978, Maechee’s mother knew the later abbess, and Maechee was thereby introduced at an early age to the nunnery at Khao Suan Luang. Later, when her education took her to university in America, Maechee used to spend long periods staying and practicing at Khao Suan Luang whenever she returned to Thailand between terms.

After university the good memories of her time at Upasika Kee’s nunnery eventually helped lead her to seek out places to dedicate herself fully to Dhamma practice. She spent time practicing in nuns’ communities, especially at the monastery of Ajahn Buddhadasa, where her teacher was the highly respected nun Ajahn Runjuan, and also spent time at Wat Pah Nanachat. Maechee came to Amaravati a few years ago and became an anagarika, staying a year with the community here before returning to Thailand where she has continued to live as a nun in a remote nuns’ community.

On the following pages are three teachings from Upasika Kee Nanayon, translated by Ajahn Thanissaro, which provide a taste of her guidance.

*Upasika Kee Nanayon, also known by her pen name, K. Khao-suan-luang, was arguably the foremost woman Dhamma teacher in twentieth-century Thailand. Upasika Kee was something of an autodidact. Although she picked up the rudiments of meditation during her frequent visits to monasteries in her youth, she practiced mostly on her own without any formal study under a meditation teacher.

Her aunt and uncle, who were also interested in Dhamma practice, had a small home near a forested hill, Khao Suan Luang (Royal Park Mountain), outside of Rajburi, where she often went to practise. In 1945, as life disrupted by World War II had begun to return to normal, she gave up her business, joined her aunt and uncle in moving to the hill, and there the three of them began a life devoted entirely to meditation. The small retreat they made for themselves in an abandoned monastic dwelling eventually grew to become the nucleus of a women’s practice centre that has flourished to this day.

Life at the retreat was frugal, in line with the fact that outside support was minimal in the early years. However, even now that the centre has become well-known and well-established, the same frugal style has been maintained for its benefits in subduing greed, pride, and other mental defilements, as well as for the pleasure it offers in unburdening the heart. The women practicing at the centre are all vegetarian and abstain from such stimulants as tobacco, coffee, tea, and betel nut. They meet daily for chanting, group meditation, and discussion of the practice. In the years when Upasika Kee’s health was still strong, she would hold special meetings at which the members would report on their practice, after which she would give a talk touching on any important issues that had been brought up. It was during such sessions that most of the talks recorded here were given.

*This introduction was excerpted from another written by Ajahn Thanissaro, who translated the following three teachings from the Thai, and which can all be found in the book An Unentangled Knowing, available online and for free from Dhamma Dana Publications.
The Practice in Brief

Those who practice the Dhamma should train themselves to understand in the following stages:

The training that is easy to learn, gives immediate results, and is suitable for every time, every place, for people of every age and either sex, is to study in the school of this body – a fathom long, a cubit wide, and a span thick – with its perceiving mind in charge. This body has many things, ranging from the crude to the subtle, that are well worth knowing.

The steps of the training:

1. To begin with, know that the body is composed of various physical properties, the major ones being the properties of earth (solidity), water (cohesion), fire (heat), and wind (movement); the minor ones being the aspects that adhere to the major ones: things like colour, smell, shape, etc.

These properties are unstable (inconstant), stressful, and unclean. If you look into them deeply, you will see that there’s no substance to them at all. They are simply impersonal conditions, with nothing worth calling ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ When you can clearly perceive the body in these terms, you will be able to let go of any clinging or attachment to it as an entity, your self, someone else, this or that.

2. The second step is to deal with mental phenomena (feelings, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness). Focus on keeping track of the truth that these are characterized by arising, persisting, and then disbanding. In other words, their nature is to arise and disband, arise and disband, repeatedly. When you investigate to see this truth, you will be able to let go of any clinging or attachment to it as an entity, your self, someone else, this or that.

3. Training on the level of practice doesn’t simply mean studying, listening, or reading. You have to practise so as to see clearly with your own mind in the following steps:

a) Start out by brushing aside all external concerns and turn to look inside at your own mind until you can know in what ways it is clear or murky, calm or unsettled. The way to do this is to have mindfulness and self-awareness in charge as you keep aware of the body and mind until you’ve trained the mind to stay firmly in a state of normalcy, i.e., neutrality.

b) Once the mind can stay in a state of normalcy, you will see mental formations or preoccupations in their natural state of arising and disbanding. The mind will be empty, neutral, and still – neither pleased nor displeased – and will see physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disband naturally, of their own accord.

c) When the knowledge that there is no self to any of these things becomes thoroughly clear, you will meet with something that lies further inside, beyond all suffering and stress, free from the cycles of change – deathless – free from birth as well as death, since all things that take birth must by nature age, grow ill, and die.

d) When you see this truth clearly, the mind will be empty, not holding onto anything. It won’t even assume itself to be a mind or anything at all. In other words, it won’t latch onto itself as being anything of any sort. All that remains is a pure condition of Dhamma.

e) Those who see this pure condition of Dhamma in full clarity are bound to grow disenchanted with the repeated sufferings of life. When they know the truth of the world and the Dhamma throughout, they will see the results clearly, right in the present, that there exists that which lies beyond all suffering. They will know this without having to ask or take it on faith from anyone, for the Dhamma is paccattam, i.e., something really to be known for oneself. Those who have seen this truth within themselves will attest to it always.
We have to catch sight of the sensation of knowing when the mind gains knowledge of anything and yet isn’t aware of itself, to see how it latches onto things: physical form, feeling, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness. We have to probe on in and look on our own. We can’t use the teachings we’ve memorized to catch sight of these things. That won’t get us anywhere at all. We may remember, ‘The body is inconstant,’ but though we can say it, we can’t see it. We have to focus on in, to see exactly how the body is inconstant, to see how it changes. And we have to focus on feelings – pleasant, painful, and neutral – to see how they change. The same holds true with perceptions, thought-formations, and so forth. We have to focus on them, investigate them, contemplate them to see their characteristics as they actually are. Even if you can see these things for only a moment, it’ll do you a world of good. You’ll be able to catch yourself: The things you thought you knew, you didn’t really know at all... This is why the knowledge we gain in the practice has to keep changing through many, many levels. It doesn’t stay on just one level.

So even when you’re able to know arising and disbanding with every moment right in the present: If your contemplation isn’t continuous, it won’t be very clear. You have to know how to contemplate the bare sensation of arising and disbanding, simply arising and disbanding, without any labels of ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Just keep with the pure sensation of arising and disbanding. When you do this, other things will come to intrude – but no matter how they intrude, it’s still a matter of arising and disbanding, so you can keep your stance with arising and disbanding in this way.

If you start labelling things, it gets confusing. All you need to do is keep looking at the right spot: the bare sensation of arising and disbanding. Simply make sure that you really keep watch of it. Whether there’s awareness of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations, just stay with the sensation of arising and disbanding. Don’t go labelling the sight, sound, smell, taste, or tactile sensation. If you can keep watch in this way, you’re with the pure present – and there won’t be any issues.

When you keep watch in this way, you’re keeping watch on inconstancy, on change, as it actually occurs – because even the arising and disbanding changes. It’s not the same thing arising and disbanding all the time. First this sort of sensation arises and disbands, then that sort arises and disbands. If you keep watch on bare arising and disbanding like this, you’re sure to arrive at insight. But if you keep watch with labels – ‘That’s the sound of a cow,’ ‘That’s the bark of a dog’ – you won’t be watching the bare sensation of sound, the bare sensation of arising and disbanding. As soon as there’s labelling, thought-formations come along with it. Your senses of touch, sight, hearing, and so forth will continue their bare arising and disbanding, but you won’t know it. Instead, you’ll label everything – sights, sounds, etc. – and then there will be attachments, feelings of pleasure and displeasure, and you won’t know the truth.

The truth keeps going along on its own. Sensations keep arising and then disbanding. If we focus right here – at the consciousness of the bare sensation of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations – we’ll be able to gain insight quickly...

If we know how to observe things in this way, we’ll be able to see easily when the mind is provoked by passion or greed, and even more easily when it’s provoked by anger. As for delusion, that’s something more subtle... something you have to take a great interest in and investigate carefully. You’ll come to see all sorts of hidden things – how the mind is covered with many, many layers of film. It’s really fascinating. But then that’s what insight meditation is for – to open your eyes so that you can know and see, so that you can destroy your delusion and ignorance.
Opening the Way to the Heart

Once you can read your mind correctly, you can catch hold of defilements and ‘kill’ them off: that’s insight meditation. The mind becomes razor sharp, just as if you have a sharp knife that can cut anything clear through. Even if defilements arise again, you can dig them up again, cut them off again. It’s actually a lot of fun, this job of uprooting the defilements in the mind.

There’s no other work nearly as much fun as getting this sense of ‘I’ or self under your thumb, because you get to see all of its tricks. It’s really fun. Whenever it shows its face in order to get anything, you just watch it – to see what it wants and why it wants it, to see what inflated claims it makes for itself. This way you can cross-examine it and get to the facts.

Once you know, there’s nothing to do but let go, to become unentangled and free. Just think of how good that can be! This practice of ours is a way of stopping and preventing all kinds of things inside ourselves. Whenever defilement rises up to get anything, to grab hold of anything, we don’t play along. We let go. Just this is enough to do away with a lot of stress and suffering, even though the defilements feel the heat.

When we oppress the defilements a lot in this way, it gets them hot and feverish, you know. But remember, it’s the defilements that get hot and feverish. And remember that the Buddha told us to put the heat on the defilements, because if we don’t put the heat on them, they put the heat on us all the time.

So we must be intent on burning the defilements away, even though they may complain that we’re mistreating them. We close the door and imprison them. When they can’t go anywhere, they’re sure to complain: ‘I can’t take it! I’m not free to go anywhere at all!’ So simply watch them: Where do they want to go? What do they want to grab hold of? Where? Watch them carefully, and they’ll stop – stop going, stop running, It’s easy to say no to other things, but saying no to yourself, saying no to your defilements, isn’t easy at all – and yet it doesn’t lie beyond your discernment or capabilities to do it. If you have the mindfulness and discernment to say no to defilement, it’ll stop. Don’t think that you can’t make it stop. You can make it stop – simply that you’ve been foolish enough to give in to it so quickly that it’s become second nature.

So we have to stop. Once we stop, the defilements can stop too. Wherever they turn up, we can extinguish them. And when this is the case, how can we not want to practise? No matter how stubbornly they want anything, simply watch them. Get acquainted with them, and they won’t stay. They’ll disband. As soon as they disband, you realize exactly how deceptive they are. Before, you didn’t know. As soon as they urged you to do anything, you went along with them. But once you’re wise to them, they stop. They disband. Even though you don’t disband them, they disband on their own. And as soon as you see their disbanding, the path opens wide before you. Everything opens wide in the heart. You can see that there’s a way you can overcome defilement, you can put an end to defilement, no matter how much it arises. But you’ve got to remember to keep on watching out for it, keep on letting it go.

Thus I ask that you all make the effort to keep sharpening your tools at all times. Once your discernment is sharp on any point, it can let go of that point and uproot it. If you look after that state of mind and contemplate how to keep it going, you’ll be able to keep your tools from growing too easily dull.

And now that you know the basic principles, I ask that you make the effort to the utmost of your strength and mindfulness. May you be brave and resilient, so that your practice for gaining release from all your sufferings and stress can reap good results in every way.
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.

bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk

Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.

Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.

Dhamma-vinaya: The Teaching and Training, or Doctrine and Discipline

kathina: An almsgiving ceremony at the end of the vassa.

Luang Por (Thai): A title of affectionate respect (lit. “Venerable Father”).

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; Those who have realized liberation (Ariya Sangha)

siladhara: A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.

sutta: A discourse by the Buddha or his disciples.

Theravada: The school of Buddhism mainly practised in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

Vassa: The three-month summer “Rains Retreat”; a mark of how many years (“vassas”) a monk or nun has been in robes.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline.
AMARAVATI

Amaravati Kathina – 2 November

The programme for this year is as follows:

10.30 am Offering of almsfood to the Sangha
1.00 pm Gather in the Temple
1.15 pm Taking the Refuges & Five Precepts by the lay community; Paritta chanting by the Sangha; Offering of the Kathina Cloth and requisites to the Sangha; Dhamma Talk

It is a Royal Kathina and the Thai Ambassador will offer the Royal Kathina Robe on behalf of His Majesty the King of Thailand.

Co-sponsors are Mrs Kay Lai Goh and Mrs Kumari Wijeratne.

All welcome!

Family events

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 or contact: familyevents@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. Events are led by experienced layteachers. All are welcome.

Days of Practice – no need to book
9.45 am for 10–5 p.m. (Please bring food to share)

Retreats – advanced booking essential
5.30 p.m. Fri. – 4 p.m. on the last day.

17–19 October: Weekend Retreat
Opening the heart (Martin)
1 November: Day of Practice
Awareness & daily life (Nick)
6 December: Day of Practice
Sleeping with the enemy (Chris)

Please check for late programme changes on our website: www.buddhacommunity.org
More information, including retreat booking forms may be found there.

Buddhist Women’s Network
7 December: Day Retreat at Amaravati
Coming Home (Jenni Jepson) 9.45 am–5 pm
No need to book, please bring food to share.

2009:
28 February: Day Retreat at Amaravati
Coming Home (Jenni Jepson) 9.45 am–5 pm
No need to book, please bring food to share.

ARUNA RATANAGIRI

Aruna Ratnanandi

Hanhom Kathina – 26 October

Hanhom’s Kathina will be held on 26 October 2008. It is being offered this year by Mr. Chawalit Prapunwong (Khun Jeab). Luang Por Sumedho and many other senior monks and nuns will be joining us. The celebrations will start at 10 am.

For more details or if you’d like to help with preparations or clearing up please phone or email Khun Jeab at 0791 903 2759 or cprapunwong@hotmail dot com

Kusala House Retreats

For the 2009 schedule please check the website at www.kusalahouse.org

CITTAVIVEKA

Chithurst Kathina – 19 October

HARTRIDGE

Devon Kathina – 9 November

Tree planting
At Hartridge we have a tree planting scheme for the autumn and are looking for a few people to help on a residential basis for up to a few weeks from mid-late November into early December. There is information about the project, and contact details, on our website: www.hartridgemonastery.org

DHAMMAPALA

Winter Retreat support in Switzerland

The community at Dhammapala offers the opportunity for experienced Dhamma practitioners to support the resident Sangha for the 2009 Winter Retreat during the months of January and February. Ideally we would like to invite people for one month, but there will also be space for those who can only stay a fortnight. Besides the helping duties, which are entirely around kitchen activities, there will be plenty of time for individual practice within the splendid mountain environment. Applicants can direct their enquiry to Margrit at info@dharmapala dot ch

BODHINYANARAMA

News from Wellington, NZ

Our very harmonious Rains Retreat draws to a close and we once again enter a more active phase of the monastic routine.

I will soon be travelling for teaching engagements in Christchurch and Sydney, plus attending two Buddhist conferences, one in Japan and one in Auckland. Quite a number of Sangha from overseas will be attending the Auckland conference and two of them, Bhante Gunaratana from Bhavana Society, USA and Ven. Aggacitta from Malaysia will also make visits to Bodhinyanarama.

The change of season brings inevitable change to the resident community. After seven years in residence at Bodhinyanarama, Bhante Jinalankara has decided to move north to be better able to offer more teaching to a wider range of people. He will likely be based in Hamilton and make frequent teaching trips to various parts of NZ and Australia.

Ven. Narado’s year in NZ is quickly coming to its end. On Nov. 26 he begins his 30 hour journey back to Chithurst Monastery, just in time for another winter (but also winter retreat). In November we also expect the arrival of two new monks. Ven. Kalyano, ordained in England ten years ago, will be staying for six months, while Ven. Nyanadasano, a Czech monk of eight Rains will be staying for six months, while Ven. Nyanadasano, a Czech monk of eight Rains will be coming to stay for several years. Also, before the end of the year we expect Tan Ming from Thailand to join us.

In the early part of the New Year, in high summer, we expect to begin the long-awaited project of demolishing the old kitchen and begin the building of a new one, with an upper storey reception and eating hall. Funds are not quite sufficient to complete the First Phase; however, with many offers of help we hope to keep the monetary outlay down while still being able to have a usable kitchen by March when the autumn rains begin.

With Metta, Ajahn Tiradhammo

Bodhinyanarama, New Zealand
SANGHA WALKS

Crete Walking Retreat with Ajahn Karuniko & Nick Scott

26 April – 2 May 2009
Alternating days of silent meditation and all-day walks in beautiful scenery. Morning and evening pujas, group Dhamma discussions and occasional reflections from Ajahn Karuniko. Simple accommodation in wilderness areas. For experienced meditators only.

For more information and to book contact: Sangha.walks at gmail dot com

PUBLICATIONS

Transcribers needed
Anyone able to help transcribe talks from senior nuns please contact Sr Jotipañña at cbmnuns at amaravati dot org

Publications projects website
There are always a number of Sangha-related publications projects ongoing. Some await final editing, some checking of translations and others looking for sponsorship or people otherwise interested to get involved. We hope to make it easier to find out about these efforts by posting information, ideas, etc. on a Publications Projects web page. Please always feel free to check the list at www.forestsangha.org > Publications Projects

Rude Awakenings Sequel
The first half of the story of their pilgrimage to India by Ajahn Sucitto and Nick Scott was published by Wisdom Publications and is still available through booksellers; however, Wisdom has decided not to publish the sequel that covers the second half of the journey. The authors are thinking of trying to make it available some other way, maybe as a free Internet download, print-on-demand, or, if there is sponsorship, printing some for free distribution. Please see the Publications Projects web page (see above) for more information, or email: Nickscott at amaravati dot org

KATHINA CEREMONIES

CITTAVIVEKA
www.cittaviveka.org
Sunday, 19 October 2008

ARUNA RATANAGIRI
www.ratanagiri.org.uk
Sunday, 26 October 2008

AMARAVATI
www.amaravati.org
Sunday, 2 November 2008

HARTRIDGE
www.hartridgemonastery.org
Sunday, 9 November 2008

– All Welcome –
Kathinas usually begin with an alms-round beginning at 10.30 a.m.
Please check the monastery websites for more details.

KUSALA HOUSE RETREATS 2009

Women’s Retreat 2–6 May 2009
Led by Ajahn Anandabodhi & Aj. Santacitta

Mixed Retreat 18–24 October 2009
Led by Ajahn Vimalo

Men’s Retreat 2009 9–15 August
Led by Ajahn Jayanto

Kusala House, Hamham, Aruna Ratangiri Monastery.
For information and booking contact Kath Ann Jones at: kusalaretreats08 at gmail dot com

or by phone at +44 (0120) 728–3361
or see: www.kusalahouse.org

Sunyata Retreat Centre re-opens
The Sunyata Retreat Centre, Co. Clare, Ireland is once again pleased to hold residential retreats, including those led by members of the Forest Sangha.

Please check our website or phone us at +353 61 367-073 for more information

www.sunyatacentre.com

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 held in the Temple

Websites
(Please see the back page for individual monastery website addresses)

Monasteries (portal): www.forestsangha.org
Dhamma Talks: www.dhammatalks.org.uk
Dhamma CDs: www.dhammathreads.org
Newsletter: www.fsnewsletter.org
Lay community: www.buddhacommunity.org
Family events: www.family.amaravati.org


Places for Practice

ENGLAND

Bath
Anne Armitage
(01225) 859219

Banbury
Sarah Wallis
(01295) 278744

Bedford
David Stubbs
(01234) 720892

Berkshire
Anthea West
(01189) 798101

Brentwood Buddhist Society:
Richard Burch
(01277) 626225

Brighton
Sam Halter
(07888) 821524

Bristol
Lisa Daix
(0117) 935 0272

Cambridge
Dan Jones
(01223) 246257

Canterbury
Charles Watters
(01227) 463342

Carlisle
Jean Nelson
(01228) 546259

Chichester
Tony Halter
(01243) 672126

Cookham, nr. Maidenhead
Emily Tomalin or David Lillywhite
(01628) 810083

Hemel Hempstead – Bodhinvaya Group:
Chris Ward
(01442) 890034

Kendal Fellside Centre, Low Fellside:
Sumedha
(01539) 729793

Leeds Area
Daniela Loeb
(01132) 791375

Anne Grimshaw
(01274) 691447

Liverpool
Ursula Haeckel
(0151) 4276668

London Buddhist Society,
58 Eccleston Square, London SW1 (0207) 834 5858

London Hampstead 1 Hillside (Rm. 6) NW5, (Entrance Highgate Rd)
Caroline Randall (0208) 348 0537 Ann Booth (0207) 485 0505

London West
Nick Carroll
(07973) 372 391

Leigh-on-sea
Liamanda Webb
(01268) 654923

Maidstone – Alokabodhi Buddhist Group:
Shirley (01622) 203751 or Bee (01622) 726414

Newcastle
Ian Plagaro-Nell
(0191) 469 2778

Newent-Gloucs.
John Teire
(01531) 821902

e-mail: john.teire at virgin dot net

Newmarket
Richard & Rosie Pragnell
(01638) 603286

e-mail: pragnost at gmail dot com

Norwich
Robert Coggan
(01953) 451741

Penzance
Lee
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Medhavi
(02392) 732280

Redruth
Vanessa
(01209) 214031

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Greg Bradshaw
(0114) 262 1509

e-mail: greg.bradshaw at btclick dot com

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Barbara Cohen (Sati-satti)
(01305) 786821

Southampton
Robert Elliot
(02380) 612838

Steyning, Sussex
Jayanti
(01903) 821230

Stroud
John Groves
(01453) 777242

Surrey-Woking
Rocana
(01483) 761398

Taunton
Annie Fisher
(01278) 457245

Teeside
John Doyle
(01642) 587274

Tonnes
James Whelan
(01803) 865667

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(+353) 21 462 2964

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Edinburgh
Neil Howell
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Glasgow
James Scott
(0141) 631 9731

Machynlleth, Wales
Angela Llewellyn
(0165) 051 1350

Pembrokeshire, S. Wales
Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson
(01239) 820970

A Coruna, Spain
David Williams
(+34) (981) 432 718

Alokabodhi Buddhist Group – Maidstone
The Alokabodhi Buddhist Group is the new name of the Maidstone Buddhist Group, who have been meeting regularly in Maidstone for about 30 years. The group receives regular support and visits from members of the Sangha. See above: Maidstone

Contact Shirley (01622) 203751 or Bee (01622) 726414

Amaravati Retreats

2008 – Remaining Retreats

R12 24–28 October 5 Days *Ajahn Anandabodhi
R13 7–16 Nov. 10 Days *Ajahn Sucitto
R14 28–30 Nov. Weekend *Ajahn Karuniko
R15 12–14 Dec. Weekend *Ajahn Thitamedha
R16 27–1 Dec./Jan. 6 Days *Ajahn Sundara

*Retreat full: waiting list in operation

Retreat Schedule 2009

R1 10–14 April 5 Days Ajahn Thitamedha
R2 17–19 April weekend Ajahn Gandhasilo
R3 15–24 May 10 Days Ajahn Jayanto
R4 29–31 May Weekend Ajahn Kovidha
R5 12–16 June 5 Days Ajahn Anando
R6 19–21 June Thai Weekend *Ajahn Ratana&n
R7 3–7 July 5 Days Ajahn Thanuttaro
R8 17–19 July Buddhist/Christian Weekend

Ven. Aloka & Br. Nicholas

R9 July 31–9 August 10 Days Ajahn Vajiro
R10 4–15 Sept. 13 Days **Luang Por Sumedho
R11 25–29 Sept. 5 Days Ajahn Candasiri
R12 9–18 October 10 Days Ajahn Thasasanti
R13 6–8 Nov. Weekend Ajahn Santacitta
R14 12–22 Nov. 10 Days Ajahn Sundara
R15 4–6 Dec. Weekend Ajahn Anandabodhi
R16 27 Dec.–1 Jan. 2010 6 Days Ajahn Nyanarat

** For experienced meditators – must have done at least one 10-day retreat

General 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 be allocated by lottery at the end of 2008. Priority will be given to people who have not 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.

Donations

No advance booking fee is required. The Retreat Centre is funded solely through donations. Donations are invited at the end of the retreat.

Contact Information

Retreat Centre, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP1 3BZ. UK

telephone: +44 (0)1442 943 239

Email: retreats at amaravati dot org

Website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org
FOREST SANGHA Newsletter

If undelivered, please return to: Amaravati Monastery, St. Margaret’s, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, HERTS. HP1 3BZ, England, U.K.

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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.

Moon phase  ⌂  HALF  ⌂  FULL  ⌂  HALF  ⌂  NEW

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
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<tr>
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ASSOCIATED MONASTERIES

BRITAIN
Amaravati Monastery
St Margaret’s, Great Gaddesden,
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Tel: +44 (0144) 284 2455
Fax: (0144) 284 3239
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Stewards: English Sangha Trust

Forest Monastery
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PO Box 132 Bundanoon,
2578 NSW
tel: +61 (02) 4883 6331
fax: +61 (02) 8572 8286
santiofice at gmail dot com

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

Please also see the Sangha portal website: www.forestsangha.org

U.S.A.
Hartridge Monastery
Upottery, Honiton,
Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (0140) 489 1251
www.hartridge.com
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust

ITALY
Santacittarama
Località Brulla,
02030 Frasso Sabino
(Rieti)
Tel: +39 (0765) 872 186
Fax: +39 (06) 233 238 629
www.santacittarama.org
Stewards: Santacittarama Association

SWITZERLAND
Dhammapala
Buddhistisches Kloster Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 6 752 241
Fax: 033 / 6 752 100
www.dhammapala.org
Stewards: Dhammapala Foundation

U.S.A.
Abhayagiri Monastery
16201 Tomki Road,
Redwood Valley, CA 95470
Tel: +1 (707) 485 1630
Fax: +1 (707) 485 7948
www.abhayagiri.org
Stewards: Sanghapan Foundation

CANADA
Tisarana Buddhist Monastery
1356 Powers Road, RR #3
Perth, Ontario K7H 3C5
Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca
Stewards: Tisarana Buddhist Association

AUSTRALIA
Bodhivana Monastery
780 Woods Point Road,
East Warburton,
Victoria. 3799
Tel: +61 (0) 359 665 999
Fax: +61 (0) 359 665 998
www.bodhivana.org.au
Stewards: Bodhivana Buddhist Centre

NEW ZEALAND
Bodhinayana Monastery
216 Kingsbury Drive,
Serpenrte  6125 WA
Fax: +61 (08) 95 252 420
Tel: +61 (08) 95 253 420
www.bodhinayana.org
Stewards: Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association

Theravada Buddhist Society

Vimutti Monastery
PO Box 7
Bombay 2343
+64 (0) 359 665 999
Fax: +61 (08) 9345 1711
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
Stewards: Auckland Theravada Buddhist Association

Theravada Buddhist Society

Bodhinyanarama Monastery
17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019,
tel: +64 (04) 563 7193
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
Stewards: Wellington

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Wat Pah Nanachat
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Amper Warin,
UBon Rajathani 34310
www.watpahnachat.org

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