HERE WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR, and a different one from the point of view of the Forest Sangha Newsletter. It appears to be the end of an era, as the quarterly editions produced for so long will make way for a less predictably-timed publication. At the moment we expect that the next issue will be published as an annual towards the end of 2010.

This means that news about Sangha events such as Wesak and Kathinas will be made available by other means. At Amaravati, which is the only monastery still relying entirely upon the FSN to serve this function, we will be publishing our own news-sheet or small newsletter at yet-to-be-determined intervals throughout the year. I expect once the Winter Retreat has finished we will look more at this and see what we can do – so probably nothing from Amaravati will be published before April or May. If you wish to receive Amaravati’s local news and announcements, please see page 18 for more details.

Besides the individual monastery newsletters and websites, the best way to find out about what’s happening in the greater community of monasteries is through the website www.forestsanga.org. In particular, the ‘current news’ page is a good place to find various announcements made by the monasteries and by the Sangha as a whole.

As the year comes to a close and many of our monastic communities ready themselves to enter the three-month Winter Retreat, we reflect on a year which has included some difficult challenges for our Sanghas at the monasteries in Britain and abroad. Some of you will have heard of the unfortunate events involving the removal of Bodhinyana Monastery in Perth, Australia from the list of official Wat Pah Pong branch monasteries. This has saddened us all, and we can only wish the best for everyone involved.

The challenges inherent in bringing an ancient yet living Buddhist tradition to the West are significant, and from time to time the tensions resulting from this are more acutely manifest. This has been one of those years, and our communities, especially at Amaravati and Cittaviveka, have needed to look more closely at the tradition and particularly at the way we are asked to hold it in relation to the monks’ and the nuns’ training. There has been not a little pain and misunderstanding stemming...
Please be aware that we are **UPDATING OUR MAILING LIST**

If you wish to keep receiving the Forest Sangha Newsletter through the post, please confirm this by (re-)sending us your name and address. You can do this by post or by email, or by leaving a note in the monastery office at Amaravati. As there are thousands of you, out of compassion for our office staff please do not try to do this by telephone. Thank you!

- To confirm by post, please send your name and address, with a message indicating you would like to remain on the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* mailing list, to:

  **FSN Mailing List, Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden, HERTS, HP1 3BZ**

- To confirm by email, please email your name and address, with a message indicating you would like to remain on the *Forest Sangha Newsletter* postal mailing list, to:

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You can also read the FSN online or download it from www.fsnewsletter.org

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**Also, please see page 18 for more on how to keep up with monastery news.**

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from this, within the community and without. Again, if you wish to keep up with news and developments on these (as well as other more ordinary) Sangha affairs, the best way is to check the ‘current news’ webpage at [www.forestsangha.org](http://www.forestsangha.org).

With all this, as we move on next year I expect that, as always, we will need to see where things are; and whatever is needed, to respond with as much wisdom, sensitivity and loving-kindness as we can. For however varied our views and perceptions might be about how to approach a particular dilemma, whenever we can act from a heart rooted purely in Dhamma the results will be beneficial in the way that counts most.

As to the content of this newsletter, we begin with an account written by Ajahn Sucitto describing and reflecting upon a walk he took earlier this year to mark his 60th year. Journeying through the English countryside for two months, much of it on his own, he often relied upon spontaneous offerings from people he didn’t know, standing (as we do in Britain) on *pindapat*, the traditional almsround of the Buddhist *samana*. ‘Bringing the Dhamma across in this day and age’, Ajahn Sucitto observes, is well served by ‘being less monastic and doing more wandering … walking the Dhamma gently into society.’

The rest of this issue is mostly dedicated to the Sangha gathering held at Wat Pah Pong monastery each year in the week leading up to 16 January, the anniversary of Luang Por Chah’s death. Actually, this material was prepared for the FSN by Ajahn Siripanyo back in March as an offering in response to a long-standing request of mine to be able to share a taste of this annual Sangha ‘family gathering’. It involves a week of Dhamma practice and teaching in memory of Luang Por Chah for all his disciples, monastic and lay – and anyone else from the surrounding area and beyond. This feature was meant to be published in July last year, but that edition ended up being cancelled. So it was then planned, appropriately, for inclusion this January – the time of year of the gathering. And it thus becomes part of the what may be the last of the quarterly *Forest Sangha Newsletters.*

With best wishes and metta,

Jayanto Bhikkhu
Ajahn Sucitto recently marked his 60th year by undertaking a two-month walking pilgrimage through the English countryside. He took his bowl, robes, a pack and some waterproof gear … and mainly relied upon spontaneous offerings of food as his journey progressed. He offers an account of his wandering here.

‘Lord Jesus Christ, walk with Sucitto on his way to Gloucester; be beside him; clear the way before him …’

I was being prayed over, with touching sincerity, by a man I’d encountered in a shopping mall in Frome, Somerset. We had struck up an acquaintance as I was being politely asked to move on by the local police. As is becoming the case in towns throughout Britain, the mall was the property of a developer who had let out lots to various retailers. Although this concentrates the focus for the average shopper, it also means that the whole area is technically ‘private’ property, and any undesirable parties (i.e. those who aren’t shopping) can be evicted from the premises. We were both deemed undesirable: my friend had been looking for a place to hold an open-air prayer meeting to pray for peace; whereas I had been standing in silence ‘eyes downcast and with bowl well-covered’ making myself available for almsfood. Hence we had to move.

The almsfood was to provide me with the food for this day’s walk. I was heading towards Bath, the Cotswolds, Stroud, Gloucester and the Welsh borders. It was the next stage of the two-month walk across southern England that was to be my 60th birthday present to myself – a chance to simplify and focus on living in faith. In this, my sense of the source of benevolence wasn’t Jesus, or Buddha, but the human heart. Call it Christ-consciousness, Buddha-nature, or faith, but the sandwich and small savoury pasty that my Christian acquaintance had just offered along with his blessings were its indisputable manifestation.

For me, ‘faith’ is good and special enough. The main intent of this walk was to live in that; to walk solo across my native land without food or a means of obtaining it except the spontaneous generosity of people who didn’t know me. Furthermore it was a ‘tudong’, an ‘austere practice’ of carrying enough gear to stay reasonably warm, dry and clean, but with otherwise nothing much.

A twist in this was the fact that carrying such gear as the damp, cool spring of Britain requires, amounted to quite some weight. So a further challenge for me in my 60th year was carrying some 15kg on my back uphill and along muddy footpaths. As I found on the first rainy day out of Cittaviveka, it’s easy enough at first, but after a few hours … and after trudging up the clay-covered slopes of the Hampshire Hangers … and after discovering that the cap of my water bottle had loosened and soaked my fleece jacket to a heavy dripping mass … walking the talk is another thing.

At the end of that first day my legs and back were so stiff that I could only get my tiny tent up bow-legged and bent-double, to then slump into it with my feet sticking out until I could summon the energy to negotiate getting my boots off. A ‘Never Again’ sign lit up in my brain … only to be replaced the next morning by others: namely the dawn light filtering through the tent wall, the chorus of birdsong, and the luxurious reflection that there was no fixed time to do anything, no one to be responsible to, and no project to look into other than that of brewing some tea, breaking camp and putting one step in front of the next. ‘Must do more of this!’ chirps the mind on those dewy mornings, ‘This is why the Buddha wanted us to go forth.’

And so in due course, I’d get the pack on my back, step out of the woodland where I’d spent the night and move steadily onwards, letting the body dictate the pace.
Yes, between the theoretical futures of ‘never again’ and ‘must do more,’ is the simple balance of: ‘now is OK, keep going’ – and that has to be negotiated with the body. In this way faith and inspiration get balanced by a direct present-moment discernment.

But who could deny me a little romance? Turning 60, and having served in and managed monastic communities for some 30 years, as well as travelling all over to spread the Dhamma, it felt like time to get back to the roots. For myself, the love of hiking goes way back from before I became a monk, and was something I eagerly took up in with my first tudong in Britain in 1982, through tudongs in Thailand, New Zealand, India and Britain again. For some, monastic life is about being in a community of like-minded Dhamma practitioners. But for me the image that fits is one of being on the road – even when, and finally because, one finds that it’s a road to nowhere other than your own deepening centre.

This is how it is – times, places, events and weather rise up with their joys and struggles … and dissolve again in the wake of opening to them and letting them pass. Through this one gets a sense that what remains was always there, before time and place confused us. Now it’s true to say that you don’t have to walk to know that, but in my marking year I also wanted to deepen the mark that many of us have made through wandering in this country by bringing the sign of the samana into the ordinary everyday consciousness of those who wouldn’t go near a monastery. This was how ‘Buddhism’ began, and so (in my opinion) wandering homeless and going to the town for alms has to be a part of a samana’s life.

However, even a fairly casual mention of my journey had brought forth a number of offers of food and shelter from the Buddhist (and nearly-Buddhist) community. As a chance to deepen the sense of connection and also to get a rest and a shower these offers were welcome and I gladly accepted those that lay in my path. Accordingly my first almsround wasn’t until entering New Alresford on day three. The omens were good: before I could even get my bowl out of my pack, a group of men laying a pavement called me over for a cup of coffee, and took in my account of who I was and what I was doing with nods, appreciative murmurs and a donation of a handful of coffee sachets.

The sign of a samana is a pretty direct one that doesn’t need a lot of explaining. One of the ‘four heavenly messengers’ (along with ageing, sickness and death), it evokes a similar reflex response. I asked the woman who on seeing me promptly placed a sweet cake in my bowl: ‘Excuse me, can I ask you why you gave me that flapjack?’ She looked slightly embarrassed for a moment, then replied, ‘Oh … well … it seemed like a nice cake to me …’, before scurrying off. Sometimes people would stop and give me a glowing account of meeting monks in Thailand, and then walk away having offered a smile and a few words of encouragement, but nothing to eat; while others would just say, ‘I saw you on the road’ and load the bowl with bread, cheese and a carrot or two.

At first I’d try to calculate what kind of person was likely to offer food. ‘Women with families, surely,’ I thought, ‘forget young men.’ But no, the offerings came as much from men as women, and of all ages including a group of teenagers in Cheddar who’d studied Buddhism in school and invited me to share a meal with them. Professed Christians as well as Buddhists and those of no particular persuasion offered almsfood and good wishes. The sign and its response are universal. Not that it’s that common. I calculated in those hour-long sessions of standing in silence, that about one in every two hundred people registered any interest in this gaunt solitary robed figure. Seen like that I could hardly blame them. In our fear-bound society, the stranger evokes more mistrust than compassion. However, one in two hundred is enough for a start; and who knows how many of the others obtained a peripheral awareness of someone who was simply calm and present. ‘Walk on tour for the welfare of
the many’, was the Buddha’s encouragement.

Following up on this I’d also accepted a few teaching engagements en route (in Bath, Stroud and Newent) and was open to meeting anyone who wanted to engage. This proved fruitful. My first spontaneous engagement came after a week when I arrived in Salisbury and through a flow of circumstances found myself giving meditation instructions to a small group of Dhamma-practitioners whom I hadn’t been acquainted with before. So that was very pleasing. On another occasion, while I was standing in Gloucester Cathedral admiring the prolonged act of faith that it represented, a woman made a beeline for me – or more accurately, for the sign of the samana – in order to get some spiritual advice. She’d been meditating, she said, but found that notions of helping all other beings were contributing towards worry about her children and a general feeling of overwhelm and stress. With the waves of her anxiety washing over me, I found myself centring in the sensations in the soles of my feet and advised her to do the same. ‘Right now, we’re just standing here. There’s the regret over the past, and anxiety over the future, but now we’re OK just standing here. This is Buddhism.’ It was very brief and subject to misinterpretation, but it worked as a place to begin. The next day, she came out to Newent to attend the day-long retreat I was teaching there.

As for my own meditation practice I found that hours of walking is quite a toll on the bodily energy, and there’s justification in saying that a tudong like this doesn’t offer great opportunities to develop samadhi. At the end of the day, I’d generally only have a couple of hours for formal practice, and it was the same for each day’s beginning. Much of that time would be involved with relaxing, regenerating and steadying energy. Certainly I got better at distinguishing the mind’s resistance to low energy and pain, and its wish to cave in from an actual need to rest. Which also means moderating the wilful attitude of ‘stick with this no matter what’, and other forms of Inner Tyrant, to one of ‘This isn’t pleasant, but right now, it’s OK and I can be with that.’ True enough though, I wouldn’t recommend tudong for anything subtle or precise.

A lot more of the cultivation took place on the move and in the scenarios that tudong brings up: the first being meeting and working with the organizing mind. When I conceived of such a trip, naturally that conceiving activated the organizing mind with its anxieties. ‘Where to go, how to go, how much to carry? Will I be cold, hungry, exhausted? Will people feed me, or will I be received with jeers?’ And more subtly ‘What are you trying to prove?’ But as soon as one hears that, it becomes clear that the walking is necessary: life is enriched by dismantling such triggers, and to enter insecurity and be freed by it is a primary aim of Going Forth. Let the unknown be the unknown and therefore bring forth one’s faith. And yet, there is need for direction and decision making. So most of the planning was approximate and laced with ‘it depends on what happens.’

Although I had a general direction, and a preference to walk on footpaths rather than busy roads, the route tended to unfold a day at a time. I had maps which made choices possible, but what established itself was the strategy of avoiding busy places whenever possible, and finding a quiet place to spend the night that was within three or four miles of a small town so that I could go for alms there the next day. To meet with specific invitations at an agreed time I carried a mobile phone so that the meeting could be arranged just a few hours in advance. Those parameters created enough structure within which to witness and work with the organizing mind.

That mind wants to know a lot: how far the next town is, which is the most agreeable route – and many times a day it asks for a progress report. I’d be walking along quite happily, then get an urge to look at the map. Then the organizing mind would come in with estimates of how long it was going to take, or what state I’d be in, or how I could lessen the weight of this backpack ... and so compound suffering out of a pleasantly mild day walking through the byways of rural England free from responsibilities. The response was about the same as I gave to the woman in Gloucester Cathedral: ‘Right now, it’s OK; the rest is unknown.’ Or at least unplannable. Because the
body knew how to walk. So the wisest way was to check the map now and then, and then just come back into the body moving along a step at a time. You can’t help but get somewhere that way. This is pretty much lesson one of walking meditation, but with the stakes raised the lesson etches itself more deeply. And most important, one learns more about working with the organizing mind rather than being controlled by it.

Another basic meditation lesson that was intensified was that of meeting painful feeling. For most of every day, the overall bodily feeling was unpleasant: blistered feet, twingeing legs, aching back, general strain. On top of which one might add the cold of rain steadily wicking itself through the gaps in my waterproof. Yet each day it was truly joyful to be free of encumbrance, of multi-tasking, and of the complexities of community life. Placing the two feeling domains together made it possible to let each painful jab flow through and not compound suffering out of it. After a while, pain became ‘that thing there.’ It was rather like living next to a noisy neighbour or a street full of traffic. You live beside it, and not in it. And it’s really worthwhile to find one’s home outside of feeling.

The last major learning for me was working with aspects of self-consciousness. I don’t actually like being on show; I’d much sooner go my own way quietly and be invisible. Yet, walking with shaved head and wearing robes is bound to attract some attention. And of course for that vital almsround, it has to. So I developed a standard of resting in kindness and letting the image of a monk quietly standing speak for itself; nothing to prove, nothing to defend, may all beings be well. It’s about the only way one can stand in a shopping street twenty-three hours and a day’s walk after the last meal without getting agitated. And it’s a great exercise for self-consciousness. After a while, it became more the norm: just rest in kindness, whatever other people (or even nervous cattle) are doing. For this moment that’s all you need do; beings will act in accordance with their kamma.

Much of the time, the responses that came my way were friendly, even awed: ‘Are you a real monk?’ I met no abusive or unkind speech although on one or two occasions teenagers, some worse for a few drinks, started out with teasing remarks. But met unwaveringly, even this melted into respect and requests for handshakes and photographs with their mobile phones. Truly the sign of a samana is a blessing.

‘The first fifty miles are the worst’ someone had counselled, and so it was. By the end of the walk, I had teamed up with Kittisaro, a long-standing friend, and was marching along, even carrying some of his load, with confidence and vigour. The invitations and offerings were coming so thick and fast it took time and planning to fit them in. Through Somerset and Devon, the land rolled and the June weather was perfect.

And so the walk concluded, at Gaia House in time for the Vipassana Teachers’ Conference. There we talked about Dhamma and how to effectively bring it across in this day and age. For me that was a major reason for doing my walk – to encourage other monks and nuns to be less monastic and do more wandering. Although others may know more about Buddhism and be more skilled in teaching, the role of the samana, their particular opportunity, has to be in walking the Dhamma gently into society. Personally, the reward is in seeing the ‘never again’ soften and melt to the point where I feel eager to keep investigating that reflex. What ever comes ‘again’, anyway? 🙃
An annual gathering

The Luang Por Chah Memorial Week

Every year during the week leading up to the anniversary of Ajahn Chah’s death on 16 January, there is a great gathering at his monastery in north-east Thailand when many of his disciples come together for six days of Dhamma practice.

Ajahn Siripanyo, currently the senior monk at Wat Dao Dum, provides the following account from his perspective living as a monk in Ajahn Chah’s branch monasteries in Thailand.

This year saw over a thousand monks and novices and five thousand laypeople put up mosquito nets (and, more and more these days, tents) all over the monastery, doing their best to let go of the outside world and focus their hearts on a different dimension. With Luang Por’s teachings as the conduit, the practice turns one inwards – to taste peace, know truth and find oneself.

Tan Ajahn Liem, the abbot of Wat Pah Pong (and these days himself referred to as ‘Luang Por’) is sitting under his kuti (simple dwelling place) receiving some monks as they arrive to pay their respects. A man of few words, he gives the young monks advice and encouragement like a warm father:

‘It just got a bit colder, but it’s not too bad. Last night was about 15 degrees. It’ll take a couple of days for the body to adjust, that’s all. If you put your sleeping sheet directly on the hay it will be warmer. A plastic ground-sheet will stop your body heat from getting trapped in the hollow stalks, so you’ll be colder. We have plenty of toilets these days, so you should be comfortable … not like before. There’s space to put up your mosquito nets behind the Uposatha Hall. Around the Chedi (Thai for stupa, or pagoda) is full of laypeople these days, so it’s not so appropriate. How many of you came? For the next few days you should surrender to the schedule. This will help eradicate unwholesome states of mind such as arrogance and conceit, and the need to have things your own way. Otherwise you will always fall under the sway of defilements and craving. It takes effort, though – viiryena dukkhamacceti: ’suffering is overcome through effort’. But if you practice correctly your hearts will experience the happiness of inner peace.’

He pauses and looks up: ‘Have you set up your bowls for the meal yet? No? Off you go then. It’s almost time.’

The monks and novices head for the eating hall, directly behind the main sala (meeting hall), which is now slowly filling with white-clothed lay people. The women far outnumber the men. Before the meal every day the Eight Precepts are given and there is a half-hour
Dhamma Talk. On this, the first day, it is Luang Por Liem, like a welcoming host, who gives the introductory talk. He stresses that initially we have come out of faith in the Buddha and Luang Por Chah, but that in order to carry out their teachings we need to develop true sati – true mindfulness:

‘We are all just part of nature: the body must change and return to its origins. When we think in this way the mind will tend to seclusion, rather than clinging to views and conceit. Dwelling secluded in body and mind, we are able to see the true nature of reality. And so we won’t fall under the sway of things that can obsess the mind and wrong views which stain the mind. The body is just a natural resource we can make use of – not a being, not a person, animal or individual. If we understand this the mind will feel cool and happy, not anxious and confused. If we strive in this way we will attain the goal we are seeking.

‘We have a good opportunity, so try to do it: renounce and abandon the things that cause you worry. The Buddha taught us to abandon all worldly dhammas. We can’t even depend on our friends and relatives. Ultimately we have to build our own inner refuge.’

He outlines the daily routine, emphasizing the need to be harmonious and helpful as we will be spending a week living together in such large numbers. Meditation, too, is taught in brief:

‘Breathe in and out. See that it’s just nature doing it’s job. Breath coming in and going out. When we understand that our awareness of this is an aspect of our mind, we see that even this is a sankhatadhamma (a conditioned phenomenon). There is no self in there. The mind experiences the breath. The mind has no physical matter, yet that is where dukkha (suffering) arises. All mental states are impermanent, so develop the quality of patient endurance with regard to all mental states, good and bad. Usually we get lost in our moods, and this keeps us away from the correct path of practice….

‘Whatever posture you are in you are grounded on the earth. Keep this deep awareness (Thai: poo roo) in mind all the time. This way you won’t think of the body as a self. It will lead to a pure happiness arising in the mind. Instead of delighting in those things which deceive us – things people run to like insects drawn to a flame – cultivate faith in the Buddha’s awakening….

‘Develop yourself internally with your mind and externally with your actions. You all know the duties regarding the lodgings and toilets. They are communal property, not owned by anyone, including the abbot. People who are mindful keep a place clean and well maintained.’

Knowing it’s almost nine o’clock, he concludes: ‘Now it’s time to provide our bodies with the sustenance we need to carry us through the next day and night, so I will end there. I wish to express my gladness that you have all come, and encourage you to make a firm determination to practise with integrity this week.’

For the rest of the day, monks and laypeople arrive at Wat Pah Pong in a constant stream. Luang Por Liem receives incoming Sangha members under his kuti all day, and by evening he still has not had a chance to find his own spot in the forest to put up his mosquito net and lay down a bed of straw like everyone else. He is just slipping away when a monk approaches him quickly to say that Ajahn Sumedho has arrived to pay respects.

He returns to his seat, first putting on his robe, and the large group of Western bhikkhus, including Ajahn
Sumedho, bows three times. The two old friends chat for a while, enquiring after each other’s health, and Luang Por Liem asks about the various branch monasteries in England. They have known each other for almost 40 years. Practising together in the old days, travelling on tudong, and serving their teacher – theirs is a lifelong bond, bound up with much mutual warmth and respect. All over the monastery similar scenes are taking place: monks who have spent time together in the past are now meeting again. Paying respects and catching up, like childhood friends.

After about half an hour there is a pause and Luang Por Liem, a little sheepishly, excuses himself. ‘It will be getting dark soon, I still haven’t put up my net.’ There are smiles all round and the visitors again bow three times. Luang Por Liem disappears into the twilight of the forest.

By the evening of the first day, several hundred monks have arrived and the number of laypeople is over three thousand. There are free food distribution tents set up – over a hundred different stalls and marquees sponsored by individuals, branch monasteries, government offices and other groups. For the next week, almost round the clock there will be all kinds of food and drink available for anyone who wants it. Luang Por Kampan Thitadhammo mentioned this in the talk he gave on 15 January:

‘It’s as if the whole country is coming together here. This is the result of Luang Por’s life. Just look at the food tents. It’s like a wholesome cycle of goodness. People come here to hear the Dhamma. Then they give food to others. Other people come to eat, but in doing so they get to listen to the Dhamma. Then they in turn want to give.’

Some locals, unable to sponsor a tent for the whole week, simply drive their pickup into the monastery with the back full of some kind of tasty snack. Parking it just inside the monastery gate, they hand out their offerings to passers-by. In not too long the food is gone and they drive off, happy to have been a part of the event and to have taken the family on such a fun outing.

The local hospitals provide first aid tents as well as traditional Thai massage and reflexology for the Sangha members. Last year there was free dental treatment and this year eye tests and glasses were offered in a marquee just opposite Luang Por’s Chedi. Over the years the scope of the gathering has broadened – as well as the range of participants. Lay supporters from Abhayagiri monastery in California won the hearts of everyone when they prepared and served American snacks from a food tent they set up a few years ago. Professionals and teachers from Bangkok come and camp around the Chedi, as well as members of what the Thais call ‘Hi So’ (from the English ‘high society’) – slang for the aristocracy and well-heeled elite, who genuinely want to put down much of the superficiality and stress of modern life and reconnect with something more meaningful and peaceful. Some tents may be fancier than others, but everyone keeps the Eight Precepts and most stick diligently to the schedule – sharing together in the predawn chill of morning chanting, queuing for food and toilets and splashing down with a bucket of cold water to bathe. It is no small matter for some.
Every year more schoolchildren come in large groups. All wearing white – girls camping in one area, boys in another – they have all the playful energy of teenagers everywhere. But a genuine sense of respect and decorum is also there, as if they know that although it’s not as much fun as a usual school trip, somehow it’s important, and it’s only a few days after all.

It’s 2.45 a.m. Way too early. But from the high bell tower to the north of the eating hall, the repetitive striking shatters the stillness. It’s time for morning chanting. You do have a choice though: you could try to find an excuse to stay bundled up in a heap of robes on the cosy bed of straw. You’re still a bit weak from that diarrhea a few days ago … your throat seems to hurt a bit – wouldn’t want to get sick on day two … with so many monks no one else would really notice if you weren’t there … but it’s useless. Only the previous day, in a talk to the Sangha Ajahn Anek had reminded everyone that in Luang Por’s time everyone was at morning chanting, and not all wrapped up in brown shawls and blankets either. Then you had to sit with your right shoulder exposed, patiently enduring the cold weather and practising anapanasati (mindfulness of breathing). You imagine Luang Por Chah’s presence standing next to where you are lying curled, looking down stony-faced: ‘Eugh! Is this how you practice?’ Spitting out some red betel-nut juice he turns around and disappears into the void. You don’t really have a choice.

By 3.05 the sala is mostly full with monks sitting, as is the eating hall. With the exception of one monk known for his eccentricity who has crafted himself a Mexican-style poncho, almost no bhikkhus are wrapped in blankets as they were the previous morning. Ajahn Anek’s words have had the desired effect and the new generation of monks seems keen to show their fighting spirit.

The laypeople, who somehow seem to have more enthusiasm for morning chanting than do the monks, have gathered en masse, and the women – mae awks as they are known in the local dialect – fill the sala and flow back out along a wide concrete road. At 3.15 the old grandfather clock chimes and one of the senior monks rings a bell: ‘Gra-ahp’ he says over the microphone: Thai for ‘It’s time to bow and chant’. ‘Yo so-oh Bhagava …’ The monk with the microphone tries to push the pace and raise the pitch, but the massed ranks of mae awks have the strength of numbers and the chanting stays slow and low. Some find the whole thing tedious; others are filled with devotion and inspiration. For 45 minutes these ancient Pali words and their modern Thai translation are recited line by line, to a slightly sing-song melody that is written only in the hearts of those who know it and who learned it themselves by listening and following along from the time they first came to the monastery.

From 4 until 4.45 there is a period of meditation. Fighting the cold and fatigue, for many it’s nothing but a struggle not to wrap up, fall asleep, or both. Others seem to have found an equanimity of body and mind. Seated on the hard granite floor, they embody the peace and wisdom of the Buddhas; still and silent, aware and knowing. Breath going in, breath going out.
By 5 a.m. the monks are setting up the eating hall, sweeping, mopping, and putting out tissues, water and spittoons. Next they prepare their bowls and put on their robes for almsround. A senior monk has the microphone and is going through some of the points of etiquette for almsround: wearing one’s robes properly, walking with eyes downcast, not swinging the arms and body about, keeping silent, and many other minor points of practice. Some newly-ordained monks and novices may still be learning all this. Others will have heard it year-in, year-out. Yet somehow it has a freshness every time and an immediate relevance. These minor training rules and the small points of monastic etiquette, collectively called korwat in Thai, were given huge importance by Luang Por Chah as the way to begin training the mind: by letting go of doing things one’s own way and being mindful to do things the prescribed way. The Buddha laid down these principles over 2500 years ago, and Luang Por knew their value.

Wat Pah Pong has about a dozen alms routes that wind through the surrounding villages. But when a thousand or so bhikkhus are in need of some sustenance, it’s the nearby town of Warin and the city of Ubon that provide much of the additionally-required calories. As dawn approaches, the monks head out of the monastery gates, each with an alms-bowl and some with two if they are attending a senior bhikkhu. Lining the road to the left, right and directly in front of the gate is a motley fleet of assorted vehicles: draughty buses and pickups and, for the lucky ones, warm minivans. The monks swarm aboard, and wait. At an unseen signal, suddenly engines rev and wheels roll, and the parade of vehicles heads for various markets and residential areas. When they arrive at their destination the monks form lines of up to fifty or more and walk along pre-designated routes. People of all ages line the way and make their offerings, doing their bit for the ngan. The food is simple but bountiful, and by the end of the almsround each monk may have emptied his full bowl up to a dozen or more times: sticky rice, boiled eggs, instant noodles, orange drinks, tinned fish, bananas, coconut sweets … staples of the modern Isan (north-east Thai) diet woven into this hallowed Isan custom – offering food to the monks at dawn. No amount of economic crisis, it seems, can deprive people of this simple joy. And no matter how often one has taken part in this act of giving and receiving it remains a little mysterious, and quite magical.

The buses and pickups return with the monks and countless baskets brimming with food. There are still two hours until the Sangha will eat, and as they walk past the food tents the novices and young monks glance enviously at laypeople nibbling away on breakfast snacks. The more senior monks keep their eyes down, having by now learned that watching someone else eat, while you are cold and hungry, makes neither you nor the other person feel any better.

Everyone gathers at 8 a.m. in the main sala for the daily taking of the Precepts. A Desana (Dhamma Talk) then follows, inevitably covering familiar ground: our debt of gratitude to Luang Por; the importance of sila (virtuous conduct) as the basis of happiness and the stepping stone to samadhi and pañña (concentration and wisdom); meditation and the need to see through the illusory nature of our thoughts and moods; to go beyond desire by establishing a peaceful mind and taste that special happiness the Buddhas praised and that Luang Por experienced for himself, doing everything he could for us to be able to do so as well.

‘Careful not to take too much food; think of all the people still behind you … A purse has been found with some money and keys. If you think it’s yours come and claim it, but you have to say what colour it is and how much money is in there … Remember not to store food in your mosquito nets. Ants will come for it – and you’ll be tempted to eat after midday…’

After the meal, once the Sangha have washed and dried their bowls, Luang Por Liem gives a 15 minute exhortation, with speakers hooked up in both the monks’ and nuns’ eating halls, encouraging us all to reflect on our duties as samanas, recluses who have gone forth from the household life into homelessness: from cleaning toilets to realizing Nibbana and everything in between.

By 10:30 the sun is filtering through the tall trees and slowly warming up the forest – time for most people
Extracts from an 8 a.m. Desana given by Luang Por Bundit:

... Every second our thoughts and moods are teaching us. People without Right Understanding think, ‘Why is it so hot?’ or ‘Why is it so cold?’ But it’s just nature doing it’s job. We don’t have to make such a big deal out of it. If we don’t understand the world, we will always experience dukkha. Disappointments will be difficult to accept and we’ll always be living for our hopes and dreams.

... People used to come to pay respects to Luang Por Chah and would complain they didn’t have time to practise, that they were too busy looking after their children and everything else. ‘Do you have time to breathe?’ he would ask. ‘Yes.’ ‘Well then, practice like that!’

... Take up the five primary meditation objects that preceptors give the newly-ordained as a theme for contemplation: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin. Doing this will help free us from being slaves to the body and all the usual concerns regarding beautification and health, and obsession with treatments and therapy.

... Luang Por taught us to abandon everything. He repeated it again and again. ... In the old days there were no doubts about the correct practice, but now everyone has a different opinion about Luang Por’s teachings.

... So learn to choose the pure things in life. If you know those things which are pure and lead to peace, then you will bear witness to the truth yourself. No one can do it for you, or verify the fruit of your practice. It’s paccattam – to be experienced individually.

... Well, that is enough for today, I’m sure everyone is is very hungry. Learn to choose Dhamma teachings the way you choose the fish you eat. A fish has scales, bones, intestines, and flesh. Whether you choose the flesh is up to you.

... Luang Por wished us well from head to toe. Even if our minds didn’t like what he was teaching us, our actions had to comply. We were like children bathing in a cesspit. Our loving father comes along and says, ‘Children, what are you doing that for?’ “Its fun.” “Get out. Now!” And Dad reaches in and pulls us out and gets water to clean us. And pulling us out is no easy job. Some Ajahns leave their disciples to wallow in the cesspit. But Luang Por never did. With just his instruction he was able to extract poison from our hearts. It was like taking a bitter medicine which tasted awful, but we knew it would save our lives …

‘Luang Por’s teaching spread far and wide: Patiently endure. Endure with patience. Dare to be patient. Dare to endure. Khanti paramam tapo titikkha: Patient endurance is the supreme incinerator of defilements. Khanti, or patient endurance, is like a fire that no coal or electricity could ever produce. We chant tapo ca brahma-cariyanka – the austerities of leading the Holy Life. These are the austerities that can burn up our defilements.

‘One aspect of this is the morning and evening chanting … Please give up your own preferences and be present for these activities. If during morning chanting there are no monks, but for the meal there are loads, it feels a bit strange doesn’t it? Between following your own preferences, or the opinion of society, or the Dhamma – which is better? These days notions of personal liberty have so filled people’s minds that they have no room for Dhamma any more. Luang Por is still with us in spirit. So I ask everyone to please meet together in harmony, so that if Luang Por were here in person he would be happy …’

The Sangha pays respects to the senior monk who has given the talk and an announcement is made to go
to the eating hall for the afternoon drink... ‘if there is one’. It’s a slightly tongue-in-cheek reminder that we shouldn’t take anything for granted. These days though, there is always something available. Tea, cocoa, freshly-squeezed sugarcane and orange juice; drinks containing aloe vera chunks and other afternoon-Allowable ‘medicinal’ nibbles: sugarcane lumps, candied ginger and a kind of bitter-sour laxative fruit known as samor. The laypeople too have had their fill of afternoon Dhamma, and those keeping the Eight Precepts partake in similar fare.

Everyone is encouraged to take part in a group walking meditation circumambulation around the Chedi – the monument to Luang Por Chah where his crystallized bones, revered by many as holy relics, are kept. All too soon it is almost 6 p.m. and the bell is ringing for evening chanting. The relentlessness of the schedule is a reflection of Luang Por’s training methods: keep everyone pushing against their own preferences and desires in order to go beyond them; surrender to the communal routine and allow the sense of self to dissolve into a group identity, and beyond that to experience the sense of being nothing other than nature arising and passing away; have constant reminders and teachings so that the Dhamma seeps into one’s mind – and the transformation from being one who suffers through clinging, to one who is free through letting go, can take place.

The first hour of the evening session is silent meditation. The January air is crisp and cool and it is the mosquitoes’ feeding time. The sala is full, and all around it and stretching into the forest are men and women wrapped in white, some young though most older, simply sitting, being aware of the in- and the out-breath. Inside the Chedi too people are meditating, finding warmth in the enclosed space and inspiration from being so physically close to Luang Por’s remains. As they sit, groups of people, families, children, stream in and out and pay respects – three bows – before heading off, perhaps to get some noodles at the food tents, or maybe just going home. Over in the sala the chanting begins, and the voice of the monk leading it drifts into the Chedi from a nearby loudspeaker. Many of the meditators stay motionless, but most slowly open their eyes, and shift their posture from cross-legged to kneeling in the traditional Thai way for chanting. By some kind of unvoiced mutual consent they agree that the monks’ pitch is a little too high and settle for something a few tones lower – creating an eerie discord which echoes hauntingly around the inside of the chamber.

Outside it’s noticeably colder. By the time the evening Desana starts around 8 p.m. the northern wind has picked up, adding to the talk the flavour of khanti – patient endurance. This was always one of Luang Por’s favourite themes anyway, one reflects. The monks giving the week’s evening talks are Luang Por Chah’s most senior disciples. They know how to inject lightness and humour into their teachings; stories of Luang Por abound, as well as humorous anecdotes from their own lives. The language used is mainly central Thai, but those monks who are native to the north-east will often switch abruptly to the local Isan dialect – a language full of puns, wordplay and innuendo – much to the delight of the local crowd. Dhammapada verses, old sayings, and nearly-forgotten proverbs are given an airing, complete with the Ajahn’s personal commentary. Isan is not a written language, and listening to these old monks one gets a sense of the power of an oral tradition. Even if none of Luang Por’s teachings had been recorded we would still be able to enjoy them today, from the minds and through the voices of the disciples he touched. The Buddha’s teachings were not written down for several centuries, yet they managed to survive in a similar way.

You are asleep the second your head hits the straw mattress. One day merges seamlessly into another – all too soon that monk in the bell tower is doing his thing and you find yourself heading back to the sala for morning chanting. Each day is a little easier though. The floor seems less hard. It’s a bit warmer, too. The mind is
uplifted, buoyed by the company of so many people sharing the space and practising in the same way. Surely that’s what it is … though maybe it’s something else …

16 January: the big day arrives. As if to acknowledge one of the most unique aspects of Luang Por’s legacy, the international Sangha, the morning Dhamma Talk will be given by Ajahn Jayasaro, who is English. The evening programme will feature Dhamma Talks to be given right throughout the night, but the first one – the prime-time slot – will be from Luang Por Sumedho.

17 years to the day have passed since Luang Por passed away. He was cremated on the same day one year later. The main event of the day is a mass circumambulation of the Chedi by the whole assembly. The numbers will swell to many hundreds more, boosted by people who have come just for this event. With the whole Sangha and all the laypeople gathered together like a sea of brown robes followed by a white foamy wake, the effect is quite magical. Beginning in the main sala, the assembly walks in complete silence, everyone holding a small set of candles, flowers and incense, for the few hundred metres until reaching the Chedi which the procession then circumambulates. As everyone gathers round the Chedi, a senior monk reads out a dedication to Luang Por and everyone follows, reciting line by line. The Sangha leads the way up the steps and into the Chedi. Each person places their little offering, then bows and makes way for another.

In the evening, Luang Por Sumedho begins his Desana. Before moving to loftier dhammas, he too entertains the crowd with some warm old memories. He recalls how Luang Por used to teach the Dhamma for hours on end, cracking jokes and telling stories which would have everyone in stitches – except for one person: Venerable Sumedho, this newly arrived American monk squirming in pain on the cement floor unable to understand a word. They’ve heard it before, but again it brings smiles. These stories though, are not told just to get a few laughs. They capture the spirit of a bygone era for those of us who never heard Luang Por Chah teach, and they prepare the minds of the listeners to hear and be more likely to truly receive the essence of the Dhamma: that all is uncertain, unstable, and that happiness comes from letting go.

Which is just the insight you need in order to last through a whole night of Dhamma Talks. This all-night talks

Extracts from an 8 a.m. Desana given by Ajahn Jayasaro:

... It’s been 17 years now since Luang Por left us, although actually that is not quite true. Luang Por never left us – we are the ones who leave him behind. Every time we think, say, or do something that he pointed out the danger in we leave him behind. There are so many of his teachings around, books, tapes etc. His Dhamma is still with us. But we frequently leave his teachings behind, sometimes turning our backs on the Dhamma entirely. Luang Por Chah is not with us today, but the question is, are we still with Luang Por Chah?

... Not having Right Understanding (samma ditthi) is what will prevent true happiness from arising. We won’t see the true nature of the world: the fact that dukkha is everywhere. The good news is that true happiness can also be found. It is not about suppressing the happiness that we can experience through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, but rather asking ourselves if that is true happiness. Is that what we need ultimately? Sensory happiness makes us waste our time, and diverts our interest away from developing ourselves to find that true happiness.

Say you had enough money to go abroad and you flew to some other country. Then from the airport you went straight to a hotel, checked in and went to your room, closed the windows and stayed there for two weeks. You then went back to the airport and flew home. Would that be unwholesome? No. But it would be a pity, a wasted opportunity. Being born as a human being, but only being interested in the pleasure of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and thoughts, is a similar waste. It’s really like living in a dark room.

... Luang Por Chah taught us that our real task in life is to cultivate a healthy shame and fear of losing our mindfulness (sati). We must always strive to maintain sati. If we have sati, it’s like we have an Ajahn with us. We feel warm and safe: whenever we make our mind steady, wisdom is ready to arise. Without sati we will always be slaves of our environment and simply follow whatever thoughts and moods arise….
routine seems to be a unique feature of the Wat Pah Pong tradition – and you have to be seriously dedicated to hearing Dhamma to even want, let alone be able, to sit on a hard floor for ten hours. Understanding the language too, is a distinct advantage. Most people nip off for a small rest at some point in the evening; but some seem to sit motionless throughout, in a kind of ‘Desana trance.’ The first couple of speakers talk for about an hour; after that it’s half an hour each. So, altogether fifteen or so Dhamma Talks ring throughout the forest on loudspeakers right through till dawn. A bell is struck to let any speaker who’s getting a bit carried away know that his 30 minutes are up. The style of Desana is usually unstructured, which is typical of the Thai forest tradition. Anyone who miscalculates his allotted time therefore can easily wrap it up and make way for the next speaker when he hears the bell. The last speaker is still going at full speed at 5 a.m. as the monks, one last time, begin to set up the eating hall and then stream out the gates towards the waiting armada of almsround road transport.

On this last morning the Sangha and laity gather in the sala one final time, to take leave and ask forgiveness of the most senior monks. After a week of remembrance dedicated to Luang Por Chah, it seems fitting that the endnote is an acknowledgement of our present-day teachers. Luang Por Liem, appointed by Luang Por Chah to be his successor as abbot of Wat Pah Pong, receives the traditional offerings of toothwoods – wooden toothbrushes made from a bitter vine that the monks meticulously fashion in advance and bring to the gathering to give to senior Ajahns as a token of respect.

After a few words of farewell and one last blessing the 2009 memorial gathering is over. The last meal is taken and followed by a mass exodus. Thousands of mosquito nets are taken down and tents dismantled; vans are loaded; as many as 15 people crammed in to the back of a pickup truck for journeys of up to several hundred kilometres. Rubbish is collected and areas swept. In the eating hall the spittoons are dried one last time, the water bottles bagged up for recycling, the sitting mats put away. Within a few hours the monastery feels deserted. Only the resident community of forty or so monks and the nuns in their own section remain, doing the final clear up.

The following day is a Sunday. In the afternoon some visitors including a couple from Bangkok stop by Wat Pah Pong to pay respects, and hopefully make some offerings to Luang Por Liem. A lone monk sweeps the concrete road around the Chedi,
and not a trace remains of the thousands of residents over the previous week or the mass circumambulation the day before. Not someone who seems too interested in taking a break after a hard day’s night, Luang Por Liem is in town looking for building materials. He won’t be long though, the group is told. Sure enough, within half an hour he is back:

‘I went in to town to get some pipes. We are building more toilets for next year’s gathering. More and more people seem to come. More people means more waste. It’s natural. If we can see the body as part of nature – natural elements and not a self – then peace will arise in the heart. This peace leads to true happiness.’

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

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, many have 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.

bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk

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

dana: Giving, generosity; offering, alms.

Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.

kuti: A hut or simple dwelling.

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.

Sangha: The community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns; alternatively, those who have realized liberation (Ariya Sangha)

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

Tan (Thai): A common title of respect.

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.
Amaravati

Web developer needed

We could use help with developing and maintaining the Amaravati website. Someone with some programming experience would be ideal. If you think you might be interested, please write to: monasterysecretary at amaravati dot org

Family events

Rainbows Weekend: 30 April–3 May
Rainbows Weekend: 25–27 June
Family Camp: 21 – 23 August
Young Persons’ Retreat: 26–28 November
Creative Retreat: 10–12 Dec. (age 18+)

Booking forms and further information about these and all family events can be found at www.family.amaravati.org or contact: familyevents at amaravati dot org

Lay events 2009–10

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association: These events are led by experienced lay teachers or the Sangha.

Days of Practice (DoP) – no need to book 9.45 a.m. for 10–5 p.m. (Please bring a ready-to-eat packed lunch)

Retreats – advanced booking essential*

5.30 p.m. Fri. – 4 p.m. on the last day.

16 January 2010: Winter Day of Practice
13 February: Winter Day of Practice
6 March: Winter Day of Practice
4 April: Day of Practice
21–23 May: Weekend Retreat (Chris Ward)
5 June: Day of Practice
16–20 July: Five-day Retreat (Martin Evans)
14 August: Day of Practice
18 September: Day of Practice
1–3 Oct.: Weekend Retreat (Nick Caroll)
13 November: Day of Practice
19 December: Day of Practice

*Retreat booking forms and event details can be found on our website: www.buddhacommunity.org

Buddhist Women’s Network

12–14 Feb.: Weekend Retreat, Pennines, led by Chris Blain. (Contact: 01434 322176)
7 March: Day retreat at Amaravati
23–25 July: Weekend retreat at Amaravati
19 December: Day retreat at Amaravati

For details: jenniebson at yahoo dot co.uk

Aruna Ratanagiri

Kusala House manager needed

For unexpected reasons our current and wonderful Kusala House manager will have to leave earlier than planned. This means that at Aruna Ratanagiri we are looking for a new guest house manager to start at the beginning of April 2010. If you are interested, please contact the monastery. For job specifications please have a look at www.ratangiri.org.uk/announcements.

Retreats at Harnham

Kusala House Retreats 2010

Mixed Retreat 22–25 April
Led by Ajahn Tirdhammo

Mixed Retreat 14–21 May
Led by Ajahn Sucitto (Fully booked)

Mixed Retreat 31 July–7 August
Led by Ajahn Abhinando

Mixed Retreat 4–7 November
Led by Ajahn Amaro (Fully booked)

Sutta Study Days with Peter Harvey
2 May, 12 Sep., 21 Nov.
9.30 to 16.00, with a shared vegetarian lunch.

Volunteer cooks wanted – please let us know if you’d like to help cook for a retreat this year.

Kusala House, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, UK

For more information and booking for these events please contact Kath Ann Jones at: kusalaevents08 at gmail dot com or by phone at +44 (0120) 728–3361 or see: www.kusalahouse.org

Publications

New photo sharing website

In addition to the new website for poetry edited by Ajahn Sucitto and Ajahn Abhinando – www.dhammamoon.org – another new website is up and running, one which shows images from the Theravada Buddhist world. You can find it at: www.allisburning.org.

Graphic and Web designers

We continue to gather a list of volunteers with Web development and/or graphic design/typesetting experience who may like to help with future Sangha publications. If you think you might be interested, please contact editor at amaravati dot org.

Grapes without a vine?

If you haven’t yet, please read about the changes coming to the newsletter on pages 2–3. As the Forest Sangha Newsletter will no longer be produced on a schedule throughout the year, monastery news and announcements, particularly from Amaravati, will not depend on the FSN’s Grapevine pages to get the word out.

The best way to find out about what’s happening, what’s being offered, and opportunities to participate at the monasteries is to visit www.forestsangha.org. There you will find links to the different monastery websites and to their own newsletters, as well as the most recent announcements of which they wish to inform a wider readership, which will be posted on the ‘current news’ page on that site.

Amaravati Newsletter

In order to inform people of what’s happening at the monastery, Amaravati will be producing its own small newsletter. We intend it to be circulated mainly via email; however, we will also print hard copies to be distributed at the monastery, and posted to those of you who prefer that.

If you would like to be put on the mailing list for Amaravati’s new newsletter, please send us your details. (Please be aware we will not be publishing anything before late April or May 2010.)

To receive the Amaravati newsletter by email (recommended), or by post:

Please send your email and/or home address to: abmnews at amaravati dot org or post it to Amaravati Newsletter, Amaravati, Great Gaddesden, HERTS, HP1 3BZ

In either case, please indicate whether you wish to receive it by email or by post.

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

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Amaravati Retreats

Retreat Schedule 2010

R1  16–20 April  5 Days  **Ajahn Paññasaro
R2  23–25 April  Weekend  Ajahn Gandhasilo
R3  7–16 May  10 Days  *Luang Por Sumedho
R4  May 28–1 June  5 Days  **Ajahn Candasi
R5  11–13 June  Weekend  Ajahn Jutindharo
R6  18–20 June  Thai Weekend  Ajahn Ratanawanno
R7  2–11 July  10 Days  *Ajahn Vimalo
R8  July 30–Aug. 10 Days  Ajahn Vajiro
R9  3–15 Sept.  13 Days  *Luang Por Sumedho
R10 24–28 Sept.  5 Days  **Ajahn Jayanto
R11 8–10 Oct.  Weekend  Ajahn Kovid
R12 15–24 Oct.  10 Days  **Ajahn Sundara
R13 5–9 Nov.  5 Days  Ajahn Thitamedha
R14 19–21 Nov.  Buddhist/Christian Weekend

***Fully booked  **Fully booked for women  *Thai speakers only

Waiting lists are in operation. Cancellations can occur – please check the website or by phone for updates nearer the time of the retreat.

General Guidelines
All weekend retreats are suitable for beginners: those new to meditation as well as those who have not attended a retreat before. It is advisable to attend a weekend retreat before booking a longer retreat. Due to high demand there is a limit of three retreats per person per year.

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 843 239
Email: retreats at amaravati dot org
Website (for updated information): www.amaravati.org
Associated Monasteries

BRITAIN
Amaravati Monastery
St Margarets, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP1 3BZ
Tel: +44 (0144) 284 2455
Fax: +44 (0144) 284 3721
Retreat Info: 284 3239
www.amaravati.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust

Aruna Ratanagiri
Harnham Buddhist Monastery
Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland NE20 OHF
Tel: +44 (0166) 188 1612
Fax: +44 (0166) 188 1019
www.ratanagiri.org.uk
sangha@ratanagiri.org.uk
Stewards: Harnham Buddhist Monastery Trust

Chithurst Monastery
Upottery, Honiton, Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: (0140) 4891251
www.chithurstm.org
Stewards: Devon Vihara Trust

Cittaviveka
Chithurst Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 SEU
Tel: (0173) 081 4986
Fax: (0173) 081 7334
www.cittaviveka.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust

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

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Dhammapala
Buddhistisches Kloster Am Waldrand,
CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 6 752 100
Fax: 033 / 6 752 241
www.dhammapala.org
Stewards: Dhammapala 31921-201-5

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780 Woods Point Road, East Warburton,
Victoria, 3799
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PO Box 152 Kallista
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Buddhist Monastery
1356 Powers Road, RR #3
Perth, Ontario K7H 3C5
Tel: +1 (613) 264 8208
www.tisarana.ca
Stewards: Tisarana Buddhist Monastery

Arrow River
Forest Hermitage
Box 2, RR 7, Site 7
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 5V5
Tel: +1 (647) 477 5919
www.arrowriver.ca

NEW ZEALAND
Bodhinyanarama Monastery
17 Rakau Grove,
Stokes Valley,
Lower Hutt 5019,
tel: +64 (0)4 563 7193
www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz
Stewards: Wellington Theravada Buddhist Association

Vimutti Monastery
PO Box 7
Bombay 2343
+64 (0)9 236 6816
vimutti.lda at gmail dot com
www.vimutti.org.nz Stewards: Auckland Theravada Buddhist Association

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Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubol Rajathani 34310
www.watpahnanachat.org
To receive the Forest Sangha Newsletter in Thailand, please write to Amaravati.

Observance Days
These days are traditionally given over to quiet reflection and meditation. Visitors are welcome. Please enquire at the monasteries, as routines vary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moon phase</th>
<th>⬤ HALF</th>
<th>⬤ NEW</th>
<th>⬤ HALF</th>
<th>⬤ FULL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>8 (Fri)</td>
<td>15 (Fri)</td>
<td>23 (Sat)</td>
<td>30 (Sat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>7 (Sun)</td>
<td>13 (Sat)</td>
<td>21 (Sun)</td>
<td>28 (Sat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>8 (Mon)</td>
<td>15 (Mon)</td>
<td>23 (Tue)</td>
<td>30 (Tue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>7 (Wed)</td>
<td>13 (Tue)</td>
<td>21 (Wed)</td>
<td>28 (Wed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>6 (Thu)</td>
<td>13 (Thu)</td>
<td>21 (Fri)</td>
<td>28 (Fri)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>5 (Sat)</td>
<td>11 (Fri)</td>
<td>19 (Sat)</td>
<td>26 (Sat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>4 (Sun)</td>
<td>11 (Sun)</td>
<td>19 (Mon)</td>
<td>26 (Mon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>3 (Tue)</td>
<td>10 (Tue)</td>
<td>18 (Wed)</td>
<td>25 (Wed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>2 (Thu)</td>
<td>8 (Wed)</td>
<td>16 (Thu)</td>
<td>23 (Thu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>1 (Fri)</td>
<td>8 (Fri)</td>
<td>16 (Sat)</td>
<td>23 (Sat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct./Nov.</td>
<td>31 (Sun)</td>
<td>6 (Sat)</td>
<td>14 (Sun)</td>
<td>21 (Sun)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Magha Puja Vesakha Puja Asalha Puja Pavarana Day

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