Taking Leave

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As if bestowing a blessing of peace, the beginning of 2011 has brought, as ever, the cool quiet of the three-month Winter Retreat to most of our Western monasteries, including those in Britain. And as spring now dawns, the monasteries will be preparing for the usual increase in activities and movement.

Much has happened since last year’s Forest Sangha Newsletter was published in January 2010. That’s a long period in traditional FS Newsletter terms: it’s now been over a year since that publication, while for so long there were FSNs coming out every few months. As most of you will know, around that time (February last year), in what was the biggest news by far for our Sangha in Europe perhaps since its inception, Luang Por Sumedho announced his wish to relinquish his duties as abbot of Amaravati, along with his other responsibilities.

Luang Por is now 76. Citing his long-expressed wish to be less of a central figure in decision-making – and the difficulty of achieving this for someone of his stature – Luang Por has said he wishes to inspire an alternative model for ‘ageing abbots’, other than the one prevalent in our tradition where abbots and senior elders can be expected to stay in charge of things right up until the moment they die.

To make this possible, Luang Por had invited Ajahn Amaro to take his place as Amaravati’s abbot. This was agreed by the monastic community last April, when after meeting with the monks and with the nuns at Amaravati and with the Elders’ Council, Ajahn Amaro was heartily welcomed to take up Luang Por’s invitation. Leaving behind all that he’d established as co-abbott of Abhayagiri Monastery in California, Ajahn Amaro arrived at Amaravati last July with a bowl bag, a small suitcase and an open mind. And – in order to facilitate this leadership transition, Luang Por had informed us he would be leaving the U.K. at the end of November.

Needless to say, this has represented a huge change for all of us associated with the monasteries to which Luang Por Sumedho has been so central. The months leading up to his departure – for Thailand, initially, though he is delighting in the uncertainty of having no plans – saw a continuous sequence of ‘last visits’ and goodbyes, to monasteries and by friends and supporters. This issue of the FSN is dedicated to Luang Por’s departure, sharing a few images and words from that time. Sangha members were all invited to offer any early memories or present thoughts concerning Luang Por’s influence on their lives that they might wish to express, by way of contributing to this issue… and though it was a busy time, and many aren’t generally inclined to submit written pieces for publication, some of the Sangha were indeed able to contribute and their pieces have been included.

As things evolve, it remains to be seen how Sangha community news will end up being published. The plethora of publishing avenues now available to our local monastic communities, via local newsletters and the Web, means news about monastery activities and the comings and goings of Sangha members is often shared there. The FSN will for the time being continue to be published on an annual basis – though the next issue will probably be released towards the end of this year. The present issue will be my last as editor, as I will be making way for Ven. Ahimsako who will be taking things forward from here.

So I’d like to thank you all for your kind comments and various pieces of feedback, your patience (for our mailing list glitches and email correspondence inadequacies) and for your attention these past few years.

sabbe sankhara anicca

With metta,
Jayanto Bhikkhu
LAST YEAR WE ASKED MOST OF YOU to let us know if you wished to continue to receive the Forest Sangha Newsletter.* This was mainly in order to ‘keep the mailing list fresh’, since, being for free distribution, the newsletter’s mailing list expands year after year and we never quite know if everyone still wishes to be on it. Refreshing the list from time to time allows us to know we’re not unnecessarily using material and financial resources.

At the same time, we are very happy to send you the Forest Sangha Newsletter in its paper, ‘hard copy’ form – so please don’t feel that this mailing list renewal represents a hope on our part that you’ll stop getting it through the post. While the FSN is also distributed digitally as a download from its website – and people these days, for the sake of the environment (though printing it out somewhat negates the difference) or convenience, increasingly prefer that medium – please just let us know if you’d like to be put on the postal mailing list (and please specify that it’s the Forest Sangha Newsletter you wish to receive) and we will post you the newsletter when it’s published.

*If you have already done this, and yet still did not receive this newsletter through the post, please accept our apologies. There seems to be a gremlin in the database who likes to play games with our newsletter record-keeping, and there were some glitches in collating all the responses we received last year. Just send us your details again and we will put you on the list.

Please note that there are now two newsletters currently produced at Amaravati – when asking to be put on ‘the newsletter’ mailing list, please specify which you mean.

Thank you!

The Forest Sangha Newsletter

The Forest Sangha Newsletter represents the monasteries inspired by Luang Por Sumedho, with an emphasis on those in Britain. It is currently published about once a year. To receive each issue by post, or to receive an email notification when it becomes available on the website, please request to be put on

- the Forest Sangha Newsletter postal mailing list
- or the Forest Sangha Newsletter emailing list

by emailing fsn-mailer(at)amaravati(dot)org

or writing to Forest Sangha Newsletter, Amaravati

(full monastery address on the back page)

Looking from Ahead

Looking Ahead is the new quarterly bulletin from Amaravati. It contains some news and announcements, an events calendar and the Retreat Centre schedule (in addition to the Retreat Centre website, the autumn edition of Looking Ahead is where the next year’s retreat schedule is first published). The current issue is always available (and sometimes updated) on the Amaravati website.

To receive it by email or by post, please request to be put on

- the Looking Ahead postal mailing list
- or the Looking Ahead emailing list

by emailing abmnews(at)amaravati(dot)org

or by writing to Looking Ahead, Amaravati
Today was a busy day. Smiling constantly, signing my name, saying goodbye, all the rest. I’ve been saying goodbye for a month now. And the day after tomorrow I’ll leave. These are the perceptions present when bringing attention to the here and now. The way it is. The body sitting like this, the breath, the sound of silence.

So that’s what you do, you keep bringing the attention back to the here and now. Really develop that. Like the admonition at the end of the ordination this morning: strive on with diligence. It means just this. No matter what we’re feeling or thinking – we keep complicating these conditions out of ignorance and attachment. The only way to break that habit is to keep reminding yourself. Here and now, posture, breath, sound of silence …

And be aware of the mood, the emotion. We’re not trying to bypass our feelings or suppress them or ignore them but be the observer of them. Right now the emotional mood is like this. Just by a continuous, relentless determination to develop this, you begin to realize profound insight and confidence in the Path.

The Eightfold Path is not a path with eight steps on it; it’s not like you do this and then you move on to that in a linear progression, from this place to the next. It’s all based on perfect understanding, samma-ditthi. I’ve mentioned the difference between ‘right’ understanding and ‘perfect’ understanding. Now this is just my own way of speaking, but right always seems to me as though it has its opposite – wrong – and there are so many things wrong … and right … but perfect is – what is perfection in terms of the reality of now? I can’t tell you what it is, I’m just pointing. It’s through this investigation of Dhamma, really observing: being the observer, the Buddha, the knower of the way it is, it’s like this.

The feeling realm is a realm of suffering. It’s a natural suffering, because of birth and death. Like meeting and separation. The perception that some of you have about me leaving on Tuesday – right now that’s a perception isn’t it? A thought, in consciousness. Then there’s the knowing of it as a thought in consciousness: it is what it is. It’s not to say that you shouldn’t think it, or that you should feel nothing, and say, ‘Ajahn Sumedho is leaving on Tuesday forever!’ Maybe I’ll never come back … because I do have this teaching of ‘goodbye forever’ – I’ve said this many times. Why do we never say ‘goodbye forever’? Except me, I say it. Because it’s too hurtful isn’t it? We say ‘See you soon, we’ll meet again, don’t know where, don’t know when’. But this is a way of contemplating: the feeling of separation is like this. The sense of loss is like this – even before it happens.

After the meal today people gathered in the Reception Room and there were strong emotions, many people crying. Separation from the loved is dukkha. But I did separate from you when I left the Reception Room, and I don’t think that was terribly upsetting for you. Because I had to go, nature called. We can understand that. But ‘goodbye forever’ – that’s pretty stark isn’t it. That’s heavy.

What I’m doing is just contemplating the language, the concepts we have of separation, using the separation that’s coming on Tuesday as a way of learning about the way things are. To integrate the Path into your life this is what you do, using the events of your life to observe, to investigate them in terms of the Five Khandhas, sabbe sankhara anicca (all conditioned things are impermanent), sabbe dhamma anatta (all things are not-self) … these are ways of exploring reality in the present. Including things that are highly personal, fraught with emotion, strong feelings one might have in the present – as well as subtle ones. There are a lot of subtle feelings, subtle assumptions we operate with that we’re not really aware of because, unless we have investigated Dhamma, we tend to operate in a more coarse kind of way: we aren’t so aware of the subtleties of the changes that we’re experiencing.

Then using this reflection on time: the future is unknown, the past is a memory. That’s something I’ve kept reminding myself with through all these years. So, the past: the event in the Reception Room after the meal – right now, what is that? It’s a memory of something that happened a few hours ago. Just seeing it as sanāna khandha (perception, memory): its like this, memory is like this.

And then maybe we make that into, ‘I shouldn’t have
felt what I was feeling; I shouldn’t have cried; I shouldn’t have indulged in any kind of emotion…. Because we have ideals: if we’re crying or we’re emotional we can think that’s a lack of mindfulness and we shouldn’t do that. I’ve heard people apologize for crying. But that’s not it. It’s not about should or shouldn’t, but instead: it’s like this. Because your ideal might be that if you were really mindful you would never shed a tear ever again.

When I was saying goodbye at the Chithurst Kathina at one point I did get a sense of being choked (I didn’t shed a tear though). But the word went around that I was crying. But what is crying? We think we shouldn’t cry. But there is a lot to cry about – life is about crying. So we’re not trying to take a stand to not feel anything and not cry, but to be the observer of it. Which isn’t a cold looking down at something, cold surgery, as if it’s some weak spot, some fault that you have to get rid of. It’s really just observing: it’s like this.

This is a realm of feeling, it’s an emotional realm, it’s all about happiness and suffering, success and failure, praise and blame. Heat and cold, pleasure, pain, hunger, birth, old age, sickness, death. This is a realm of suffering. And it’s not about holding on to a perception that life is all misery. The word dukkha means just the natural movement, the change, the meetings and partings, the birth and death, the changing conditions. It’s now getting colder, and if we decide we don’t want it to be winter, we want it to be warm and sunny, then we’re going to suffer when it’s not. But when we stop holding on to the ideas about what we’d like and then feeling unhappy because the realities of this moment aren’t what we want – then we just learn from everything that happens to us. The whole lot is Dhamma.

The world is like this. It’s not what I want. I can think of a better world, how I would like the world to be. Conditions change. And the Buddha is encouraging us to be aware of change. Very simple. Instead of trying to make things change in accordance with what I want, rather: being aware of change as it actually is, as it’s happening in the present, here and now. Because even when you get what you want it changes. You can’t keep it, you can’t petrify it and make it permanent.

So this is an encouragement to ‘strive on with diligence’. Whatever is happening: my departure or your own feelings or relationships or problems of the monastery or problems of your family, it’s all part of our path, we learn from it. You’re never going to find a perfect monastery. I guarantee it. And when you think it’s perfect, well then you know it will change anyway. So don’t go around looking for perfection in the imperfect. That’s ignorance, that’s avijja. It’s a waste of time to keep pursuing the grass that’s greener on the other side of the fence, where there’s something better, something I need.

The samana life emphasizes this, with its standard of basic requisites. We’re not asking for much. And if we do feel greedy – if we want nice robes and good food – we can be aware of that as a condition of the mind. The samana life is not for grasping, we’re not trying to make ourselves into perfect samanas; but it is a structure to reflect from. ‘I’m no longer living according to worldly aims and values’ – the dhammas to be reflected upon are very helpful in reminding us so we actually can reflect on our own tendencies, to want to impress the world, to help solve all the problems of society, of our families, of the Sangha, of our friends, and so forth. To be aware of the wanting and not wanting.

Part of the joy of this life is that as samanas our needs are basic – rag robes, almsfood, root of a tree for shelter, fermented urine for medicine – and we always get better than that. This brings gratitude. The generosity that I have experienced here in England is overwhelming. I love this country. I feel grateful because I’ve been well provided for, well respected, people are tolerant, they don’t persecute us. We feel kataññu-katavedi, this gratitude which is the samana life – rather than, ‘well, we should be treated equally to the Christians’ or this kind of thing. We can make problems about anything if we want, but as a samana you just need shelter for the night, food in the alms bowl, robes and medicine. These reflections, this samanasañña, just keep reflecting on them. I’m not trying to intimidate you by implying that you shouldn’t feel however you feel; I’m encouraging you to look at that: wanting something that you don’t have and wanting things not to be the way they are, is like this. .false
Taking Leave
of Luang Por Sumedho

On the following pages are various contributions from Sangha members who submitted a short piece, or the recounting of a memory, in response to a general request for anecdotes concerning Luang Por’s influence on them, or their first meeting – along with images from the monasteries, mainly from the time leading up to his departure.

The news that Luang Por was preparing to leave the UK after more than 33 years living here came as a surprise to almost everyone. So much and so many people have grown up around his leadership and influence since he arrived from Thailand in 1977 – life in the UK monasteries without Ajahn Sumedho at the centre of it seemed unimaginable. Yet every disciple with ears to hear knows that everything changes. And those who have taken to heart Luang Por’s teachings all these years will know that to let go of our attachment to his presence is a gift we can give ourselves as well as to him. While we may feel the grief of loss, hopefully we can take the opportunity to learn from this as a teaching, and wish him well in mudita (joy in the good fortune of others) for all the happiness he will have in knowing he has so successfully established the Sangha and the practice of Buddha-Dhamma in the West.

Last year, as time grew closer to the date of his departure at the end of November, Luang Por received many visits from old friends and supporters, while he himself visited each of the European monasteries he had founded: Cittaviveka, Aruna Ratanagiri, Hartridge, Dhammapala and Santacittarama. At Amaravati, a public Taking Leave ceremony was planned to coincide with the Kathina on 14 November; and a separate asking-forgiveness and taking-leave ceremony took place the previous evening for the Sangha who had gathered in great numbers specially for the occasion.

As usual at Amaravati, this year’s was officially a Royal Kathina, and once again the Thai Ambassador H.E. Mr. Kitti Wasinondhi offered the Royal Kathina Cloth on behalf of His Majesty the King of Thailand. In addition to this, offerings to the male and female Sangha of the Kathina cloth and much more were made and coordinated this year by a group of Thai friends who have come to be known as ‘the Tuesday Group’, after their practice of offering the meal at Amaravati each Tuesday. The day itself was impressively well-organized, with a large, diverse and good-natured team of volunteer stewards manning various stations – all of this managed flawlessly by Mark Lewis.

Over 1,000 friends and supporters came for the event, which included Paritta chanting and the traditional alms-round, or ‘rice pindapat’ around the grounds before the meal, the Kathina Offering, and finally a Ceremony of Taking Leave. In this, Ajahn Amaro began by expressing our gratitude and extending an unreserved invitation to Luang Por to return any time he might wish to live at any of our monasteries in Europe. John Stevens (ex-bhikkhu Attapemo, now a director of the English Sangha Trust) then paid tribute to Luang Por by way of a moving speech* after which gifts from the lay community of eight albums of photos of the eight Western monasteries he has founded were offered to Luang Por. Then, all who wished to joined together in the traditional way of asking forgiveness, in Pali, of Luang Por Sumedho. After reciprocating the sentiment, Luang Por offered a Dhamma Talk to the assembly, before leading us in paying respects to the Triple Gem.

Luang Por was then available to receive people and distribute the offerings that had been specially prepared to mark the occasion: a beautiful photo album of Luang Por’s influence on them, or their first meeting – along with images from the monasteries, mainly from the time leading up to his departure.

*John Stevens’ tribute is available here: http://www.forestsangha.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=412&Itemid=8
Por’s life as a bhikkhu, a DVD of 108 of his Dhamma Talks, a small Dhamma book, as well as the annual calendar, all prepared by the Sangha here and printed by generous friends in Malaysia. These gifts were also distributed at the earlier Kathinas and during Luang Por’s visits to the other monasteries, where similarly there was much appreciation expressed to Luang Por by so many friends and supporters in each place.

On 23 November 2011 Luang Por Sumedho flew east. Taking up invitations however he wishes, he has since spent time at our monasteries in Thailand, and in Malaysia and Portugal. He plans to be on retreat in the mountains of Italy at the invitation of Ajahn Chandapalo and some of the supporters of Santacittarama, before returning to Thailand for this year’s late Vassa. He has been greatly appreciating his ‘retirement’ from administrative roles, and continues to endorse the idea of elder abbots having such an opportunity available to them when the time is right.

Meanwhile, at Amaravati and more generally at our monasteries here in Europe the adjustment to Luang Por’s absence – and Ajahn Amaro’s presence – has been as smooth as could be hoped. Luang Por had stepped back as much as he could in recent years anyway, enabling the other elders to become practiced at leading the community. And Ajahn Amaro’s continued involvement on the Elders’ Council during the fifteen years since he left for California has no doubt helped him re-enter the community at Amaravati and handle as skilfully as he has the challenging role of abbot.
In 1973 I found myself in northern Thailand on a one-month meditation retreat hoping to build on an experience I had had earlier on retreat in Sri Lanka. To my surprise that one month stretched to two, then three, then four. One day a Thai monk I met suggested I should take ordination as a novice monk for the three-month Rains Retreat. I told him that was definitely not something I saw myself doing. ‘But you already live like a monk!’ he replied. It seemed my fate was sealed.

I was fortunate to have the help of a German monk who was staying in that monastery, but before long he admitted he could no longer answer my questions on meditation practice. I had access to English translations of the Pali Canon, but they didn’t address questions I had about personal experiences in meditation. Questions kept accumulating and my Thai was not good enough to ask the Thai teachers, so I just had to do the best I could.

I had heard about an American monk called Ajahn Sumedho living with Luang Por Chah in a strict and austere monastery in north-east Thailand. However, I was not in the mood to submit to a teacher or live in a formal and rigid monastic environment, so I dismissed any thought of visiting there.

For a further two years I soldiered on by myself through ups and downs, inspiration and despair until I felt I had nearly reached the end of my resources. Just then I again heard about Ajahn Sumedho, who was in correspondence with another Western monk I had become friendly with. Wat Pah Nanachat had started a few months earlier and Ajahn Sumedho suggested that my friend come for a visit, and I decided to ‘tag along.’ However, when our departure date arrived my friend couldn’t go. So on a sun-drenched December morning I started my journey to Ubon alone, hitching rides between various small towns from the north to the far north-eastern corner of the country.

The morning after I arrived at Wat Pah Pong I was taken to Luang Por Chah’s hut where he was talking to Ajahn Sumedho and some others. When they had finished their conversation Luang Por Chah told them to take me to Wat Nanachat with them.

Upon arriving at Wat Nanachat, I was struck by how similar it all seemed to what I had been reading in the Pali Canon: the monks living alone in modest huts scattered throughout the forest, then gathering together in a grass-roofed, bamboo meeting hall for meditation, teaching or the meal. Bathing was in the open air around large earthen jars with water drawn from a deep well with a rope and pulley, then carried through the forest in old kerosene tins hung over a bamboo pole. Lighting was provided by kerosene lanterns or cloth-covered candle lamps.

The next morning Ajahn Sumedho invited me to go on almsround with him and I had an occasion to ask him about my practice. To my delight and dismay he effortlessly answered my three-year backlog of questions in about 30 minutes! I suddenly realized the immense value of having an experienced and wise teacher. My practice received a new breath of life and I decided to move from the forest monastery in Chiang Mai to live at Wat Nanachat.

For the next year and a half, until his departure to England, Ajahn Sumedho continued to give teachings, exhortations and personal interviews to an ever-growing number of inspired young westerners. Many of us had started our spiritual path elsewhere and then travelled around to find the right conditions to continue with meditation. The unique combination of having clear, direct and relevant teachings in English, together with the sagely wisdom and powerful presence of Luang Por Chah and his strict but well-grounded monastic form, had a compelling appeal for those of us looking for more than temporary meditative experiences.
Ajahn Amaro opened the proceedings for taking leave of Luang Por Sumedho in the Amaravati Temple with the following invitation:

### Invitation to LP Sumedho

Luang Por!

On behalf of the monastic and lay community of your disciples, I would like to ask you to accept our heartfelt and unreserved invitation to return to this country at any time that you should wish and to stay at any of the monasteries that you have founded, especially here at Amaravati.

In addition we would like to let you know that we are committed and eager to provide suitable accommodation for you either within or near each monastery, or indeed anywhere else in the country, as would be supportive and useful to you.

I feel it is safe to say that none of us would be here today were it not for your great generosity of spirit, your dedication to the Dhamma-vinaya, and your unflagging resolve to practise and teach in the manner embodied by the wisdom of Luang Por Chah. We therefore feel an immeasurable gratitude for having received so much from you and we wish to act in accordance with that.

In this spirit of kataññu-katavedi, it is not just our duty but also our delight to offer you our wholehearted support during your retirement. We also recognize that gratitude to one’s teacher is best expressed by actually doing what he instructs, so we wish to express our gratitude both by offering this sincere and open invitation for you to return, and in our own commitment to live and practise according to the standards you have exulted and encouraged over these many years.

There are many other things that I could say but, for now, on behalf of everyone gathered here, I will say no more than to humbly request that you accept our invitation.

~ Ajahn Amaro, on behalf of the Sangha
In December of 1976, I was staying in Wat Umong in Northern Thailand. I was undertaking a period of intensive practice, in solitude, using the Burmese sati-patthana method of meditation – and yes, getting intense.

However the resident Thai monks were quite insistent: ‘You must come see Ajahn Sumedho, American monk!’ Three of them had come to my kuti and were quite animated; friendly, but insistent. I didn’t want to meet a monk, let alone an American monk; I was busy getting intense. And I’d heard that this Sumedho was from Wat Pah Pong, a super-strict monastery in the north-east. I’d heard that the training was vigorously renunciant – including owning only a bowl, robes and razor; eating a meal of atrocious food once a day, and following an exacting routine; and their teacher Ajahn Chah was apparently a tough number. Even following my own routines with a few books to read and no-one putting pressure on me, after one year of monastic life I was emaciated and grim: this Sumedho must be either a shrivelled-up ascetic or a gung-ho zealot. Not the kind I wanted to meet.

Still, the Thai monks were keen in their gentle way, and as they were my hosts, I reluctantly complied, having no idea that this ‘American monk’ was going to save my spiritual life.

The small group of us made our way to a house not far away, on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. Two monks were sitting in the open area that was the ground floor of the house, one, whom I assumed must be Ajahn Sumedho, was on a raised seat; the other obviously his attendant – whom I later knew as Ajahn Pabhakaro – was sitting on the floor beside him. They were both large and well-built men – so that put paid to the notion of the ‘scrawny ascetic Sumedho.’ Moreover, the air of gentle stillness that seemed to flow around them felt attractive. They weren’t sitting in a tense or rigid way; nor were they exhorting the multitude. As our group knelt and paid our respects, Ajahn Sumedho explained in an unhurried voice that he’d been invited to this house to give a talk – ‘but nobody’s turned up.’

I had three hours of uninterrupted conversation with Ajahn Sumedho. He listened, offered me tea and for his part mentioned that he’d been invited to England by a trust that was looking for property in Somerset. I can’t remember anything else except his continual ease, warmth and spaciousness. Come to think of it, that was the most important bit.

In April 1978 I made my way to England on family business with a note from my teacher that Ajahn Sumedho was now living in Hampstead and would be worth visiting, and this time I needed no encouragement. After a very confusing month with my family and feeling that this monastic interlude in my life was surely coming...
The first teaching I remember from Luang Por was about ‘The way it is’. Through the simplicity of his Dhamma something dawned on me; it cut right through the tendency of my mind to make things more complicated than they are, more personal. When I heard him teach in such a direct way, I remember the feeling that ‘this is something profoundly human and liberating’. It was something I could trust, and it was deeply relaxing.

And the way he would speak about the First Noble Truth was simply heart opening: ‘Suffering needs to be understood.’ I remember him explaining ‘understanding’ as ‘standing under’ in the sense of a willingness to receive, embrace what is, and opening his arms towards the audience in the Temple with a big smile. So this seemed to be something I could do: open up to the way things are, remembering to stay with the awareness of how things affect me in this moment – and how this changes too if I don’t resist change. And to be honest, that’s not always so easy.

Luang Por’s teachings have drawn me into monastic life at Amaravati, and I am deeply grateful for that.

How will life be in Amaravati without him? I don’t know. And I suppose that’s just the ongoing practice in understanding the way it is.

Ajahn Cittapala
commitment was massive. One time he accepted a sudden invitation to fly to Australia to talk to a senior monk who was in crisis; then got off the plane at Heathrow and returned to Amaravati in time to give the Sunday talk that was advertised. Then there were the management meetings, as well as his basic practice of seeing anyone and everyone who approached him or expressed an interest. A lot of them may have been a waste of time, some crazy in my opinion – but his practice was patience and openness. ‘Sowing the seeds’ sometimes he called it – so that no matter how weird the questioner was, that they would have had some experience of meeting a Buddhist monk, and received an impression of peace and clarity that might bear fruit in the future.

For me personally the busyness meant more distance from his company. Still in the early days of Amaravati, I had my own special part of the day with him. After tea, I would go round to his tiny room to massage his feet. I didn’t want advice or even to converse. It was just my privilege to offer something back, and feel him relax into his chair and sometimes nod off a little. This routine, this opportunity to offer some simple love, in the midst of the working and multitasking chaos of early Amaravati gave me ground. And even then I began to sense how, personally, he really liked a simple life. Yet he’d deliberately set up a multifaceted and populous centre in order to offer the ‘forest’ style of Dhamma practice to as many people as were interested. And that was out of gratitude for what Luang Por Chah had offered him.

The offerings weren’t always so sweet. Ajahn Sumedho’s thundering blasts were an occasional part of the Amaravati menu, especially if he sensed that people were getting stuck in themselves, wanting privileges or ‘missing the point’ – such was his respect for the samana ethic. And contemporary issues, psychological perspectives or negotiating as part of a group were never his forte. Genuinely concerned and sympathetic as he was with all kinds of people, he expressed this well in one-to-one situations (where by contrast I would feel awkward) – whereas in group discussions he could be less effective. So our attempt to navigate the details of what occurs when traditional monastic life based on the Thai forest tradition meets the interpersonal issues and attitudes of the West, has remained a major and challenging task.

With Ajahn Sumedho understanding the need to cover the conventional aspect of Sangha life, the group of abbots of the monasteries that saw him as their founder and inspiration, coalesced into the Elders’ Council, and widened to include the senior nuns. This would have been in the early nineties, around which time Ajahn Sumedho adjusted his position to that of a supervisory ‘father’ of this Sangha, which he signalled by adopting the honorific ‘Luang Por’.

So, when in turn Luang Por Sumedho asked me to look after Chithurst, there was really no choice in my mind. I knew that it would mean even less time with him, but maybe I’d received from him all that I could. He’s guided me into a way of living Dhamma, and I have to take it from there. Now as he leaves the West, I have my Luang Por nimitta (image) internalized and a wish to sustain what he’s set up. Anything more would be greedy.
As a layperson 30 years ago I was translating for Luang Por Sumedho during a retreat in a Swiss mountain chalet. In an interview, one of the cooks remarked that the retreat was indeed going well for her, but that she often found herself thinking about how it would be if she didn’t have to cook. She imagined that without the ‘distraction’ of cooking, the retreat could be even better. After I had conveyed this in English to Luang Por, I added, ‘Indeed, I’m having similar thoughts: I keep thinking, “What if I didn’t have to translate all the time….”’ After a pause, Luang Por looked at us with a sly grin and said, ‘What if I didn’t have to teach….’”

Ajahn Khemasiri
Luang Por
Ajahn Candasiri

Luang Por is old now.

When I first met him at the Hampstead Vihara in London he seemed immensely strong, radiant and supremely confident in the monastic training he had first undertaken ten years previously. It was a surprise to me that when I challenged him during our first meeting – ‘Are you saying that everyone should live a monastic life?’ – he seemed taken aback. In the end it was Ajahn Anando who came to the rescue, saying, with a charming smile, ‘No, not at all. But it suits us,’ and I was won over!

Later on, during an interview on my first retreat at Oakenholt Buddhist Centre, in just a few words Luang Por revealed a priceless treasure. He pointed to the aversion that was keeping me stuck in a pattern of thinking that had seemed to be the cause of my current misery: ‘It’s not the condition that is making you suffer, it’s your aversion to it.’ And a light went on: ‘Oh yes!’ – as has happened for so many others over the years. Other things he said during that first retreat – about the prospective monastery at Chithurst: ‘We may even have a place where women can come and train as nuns ...’ – planted the seed of my own monastic vocation; even though, only a few weeks before, I had been saying discouragingly to a friend that being an anagarika was much too extreme as a way of practice!

Some weeks after that retreat Luang Por visited Scotland, and I attended a talk that he gave in Edinburgh, my home city. I was scared, excited and wanted to help; by then he had become second only to Superman in my mind – and again I was struck by his shyness and awkwardness when I spoke to him after the talk.

Perhaps it’s this sense of vulnerability that has inspired me most over the years. This commitment to sharing what he can of his understanding as a way of repaying his own teacher, Luang Por Chah – whatever it took – has encouraged me to go beyond the sense of concern about whether a Dhamma offering is sufficiently perfect (in my opinion) and to just do my best, as a way of repaying him.

The difficulty of the past few years has been a shock to all of us. With his departure now, in the midst of what still feels like a sense of estrangement from the Sisters, I find myself bemused, not really able to find any position with it ... which is fine. Luang Por Sumedho has given me what I need to end the suffering in my life; now I just have to use what he has shown me to that end. I don’t need him to approve of, or to love, or even to like me. Over the years, on many occasions he has demonstrated his concern through countless gestures of personal kindness – not to mention the fact that he has enabled this training, this way of practice for me as a nun.

I thank him from the bottom of my heart, and I wish him well. 
Luang Por Sumedho really had his work cut out in those early days at Chithurst. Establishing an Asian Buddhist tradition in an almost derelict house, with some what one might call ‘interesting characters’ helping out, had its challenges. We had morning ‘gruel’ meetings almost every day. Luang Por would give regular morning reflections and if people were behaving inappropriately he’d mention it as a general reflection and hopefully the relevant person would pick up on that. As a former anagarika from those days recently commented to me, ‘We all knew who Luang Por was talking about.’ That was the first step, after which if there was no effect the person would receive a direct admonishment.

When Luang Por would talk to us about practice it was uncanny – and very helpful – how he seemed to talk about things that were happening in my mind at the time, which helped to bring about awareness and a wiser perspective on it. I wonder if I was the only one who sometimes thought, ‘Luang Por can read my mind.’ I found those early days as new anagarika challenging both mentally and physically, and I feel very grateful to Luang Por for his wisdom, patience and kindness and the inspiration he gave me to keep going and learn from those challenges, the benefits of which stay with me to this day.

Ajahn Karuniko
It was his saying no to a second cup of coffee that hooked me. Around November 1974 I was living as a novice monk in Wat Bovorn Monastery in Bangkok when a friend came by and offered to introduce me to ‘this great guy called Ajahn Sumedho’. Apparently this amazing American bhikkhu usually lived upcountry in a remote forest monastery with a relatively unknown teacher called Ajahn Chah. But he’d had to come to Bangkok for medical treatment: his right leg was so swollen they thought he might have elephantiasis or something equally terrible. And I just ‘had to take this opportunity to meet him’. As we walked to Wat Saket Monastery I had no idea what to expect. I was in Thailand hoping to sit at the feet of a serene, humble, enlightened Asian monk. What I found at Wat Saket that day, sitting in a very small room, was a large white man with a loud laugh. If truth be told he did not exhibit the signs of a holy man, at least not my image of one.

That is, until we drank coffee. It would have been easy for him to say yes when offered a second cup, but the way he said no. I was amazed. I had never met anyone with such a wicked sense of humour, clearly intelligent and educated, but who knew how to say no. He said it so gently. So completely. He wasn’t trying to be holy or spiritual or anything in particular. He had real discipline. And I didn’t. Several aspects of his appearance were disappointing to this quiet young Kiwi guy who had not long since been protesting against America’s unsubtle presence in SE Asia. So it was not the outer form of the man that struck me. It was the spirit.

To have encountered the spirit of the Way at that stage in my life is something for which I am forever grateful. Ajahn Sumedho’s joy, his determination and his willingness to share his confidence in the Way, are truly precious gifts. He helped shape me, support me, and discipline me in those all-important early years as a trainee bhikkhu.

I was sorry when he left Thailand in 1977 to start a monastery in Britain. But whatever disappointment I felt then was replaced with more gratitude again when in 1980 I joined him at Chithurst.

In some ways the austerity of those early pioneering days were more challenging than our time in Thailand. This was a fully secular society not short of opinions on how we must change everything and fit in to the West. Ajahn Sumedho was living in an even smaller room yet he still exuded the same confidence and had his huge smile. His enthusiasm and the generosity of heart he manifested were what the fledgling community was nourished by. Certainly without the material support of the lay people we wouldn’t have survived. But no amount of food, clothing, shelter and medicine is enough to establish a spiritual community. Community needs heart. Ajahn Sumedho had it and he shared it, powerfully.

As tends to happen however, with time and heedless habits, one can forget the good fortune and focus on limitations. As our community grew into several communities, as more people joined, the number of things that appeared not quite right multiplied. And so it was that I entered the dark years of ingratitude. Nothing Ajahn Sumedho did was good enough. Now it wasn’t merely...
his appearance that disappointed me, everything disappo-
tioned me: he wasn’t sensitive enough, patient enough, fair enough or anything enough. All I could see was what was wrong with him and the community. In some areas in my life I am able to learn things quite fast, but in giving up ill will I am a slow learner. In this case it took me seven years.

For seven years Luang Por Sumedho, as we had come to call him, put up with my resentment and bitterness. Until, during the Winter Retreat one year, I woke sud-
denly in the middle of the night from a disturbing dream and realized what I was doing to him and to myself. Ostensibly I was a Buddhist monk, cultivating kind-
ness and understanding, but in reality I was a seriously deluded unhappy person lost in blaming others for my suffering. As soon as day broke I rang Luang Por and asked if I could come down to Amaravati and see him. This was not a normal request for midway through the three-month retreat period. But characteristically he said I was very welcome.

We didn’t need to say much when we met. It was clear. There were tears and they spoke louder than words. Quietly I found I could remember what it was that called me to embrace spiritual life in the beginning, and gratitude returned. With a feeling like being nourished with nectar, a selfless sense of participating in something wonderful reappeared. I remembered the gift of spiritual community. The gift Luang Por Sumedho had given us. Yes there was remorse for having allowed myself to be so caught in criticism and complaining but the strength of

heart which comes with gratitude kept remorse and sad-
ness in perspective. Such suffering is what teaches us. If we don’t add anything extra we ‘get the message’ and let go. I guess the time it takes before we let go depends on how stubborn we are. It also makes a big difference if we have a good example to inspire us.

Luang Por Sumedho is more than a great guy. He is a great being. He knows the truth that whatever our experi-
ence may be, in essence it is just so. He knows how to live life without adding anything extra. What an example. What a blessing. What a privilege.
Brief Encounter – Permanent Change
Ajahn Amaro

It was mid November 1979. I had just arrived to stay at the crumbling Victorian mansion that had become Chithurst Forest Monastery. Over the preceding two years I had made my acquaintance with Buddhism in Thailand and had received ordination as a monk with the Venerable Ajahn Chah. More immediately I had just spent four weeks visiting my ailing parents in Kent and now, since they were both home after their respective hospitalizations, I had come to stay at the monastery for an indefinite period.

I was a somewhat nervous twenty-three-year-old who had just finished his first Rains Retreat as a bhikkhu. Luang Por Sumedho (or ‘Tan Ajahn’ as he was always known at that time) had moved to England in May of 1977. I had thus not met him in Thailand but, as well as the monastery for Luang Por Chah’s Western students which he had founded, he had left his reputation behind him. He was known to be an awe-inspiring Dhamma teacher and to have the highest standards when it came to rigorous practice of the monastic life.

If he had been an exacting teacher in the earliest days of Wat Pah Nanachat, he certainly had not slackened off when coming to the West. Chilling but inspiring tales had reached us at Nanachat of cold showers in the Hampstead Vihara at 3:00 am, and group ten-hour sittings – he was plainly an uncompromising teacher and one seemingly out of the classic ‘take no prisoners’ school of the Thai forest ajahns. Long conversations were carried on about him over semi-licit cups of tea at the robe-dying shed and, to be completely honest, part of me had felt glad to be in the by-now familiar confines of Wat Pah Nanachat rather than under the fierce tutelage of this great master in England.

I had met Luang Por Sumedho on a couple of occasions before I moved into Chithurst; firstly when I had come to pay respects during the initial few days after I returned from Thailand, then a week later when I had been present both for the Eight Precept ordination of the first four nuns, and at the bhikkhu ordination, which took place over the weekend of 27–28 October that year. During that first meeting, up in one of the few habitable rooms of Chithurst at that time, I had been completely in awe. I can remember little of what was said other than the Ajahn was warm and genial and that, when at the end it came to the subject of my family, he offered whatever support he could give and gave his first piece of personal advice: ‘Don’t make yourself difficult to look after.’

That had been extremely useful guidance as the state of affairs into which I had had to step – with my father in one hospital after a heart attack and my mother in a different one following an intestinal collapse – had been testing, to say the least. It was a crisis situation and my appearance on the scene, as a newly-ordained monk in a religion my immediate family knew nothing of, only added more uncertainty and weirdness to the mix. Luang Por Sumedho’s advice thus helped my whole family in those weeks and it presaged what became, for me, the most memorable encounter of those early times.

I had only been living at Chithurst House for a few days and, being a classically rambling Victorian mansion with a front and back stairs and a small warren of
dry-rot filled rooms, as I recall it, I had lost my way in the
labyrinth. I had hurriedly opened the door of a room that
I had presumed to be empty, only to find to my horror
that not only was it Tan Ajahn Sumedho’s room but, far
worse, there he was himself – and sitting in meditation
too. Oh no!
A bolt of fear and regret shot through me as he
opened his eyes and I spluttered out an apology for dis-
turbing him, my heart pounding. In response he gave me
the most tender and sincere smile and said: ‘Adaptability
is my practice.’
I saw he meant it and, at that moment, something in
me melted, something irrevocably changed. My projec-
tion of the ferocious task-master dissolved and through
it shone the presence of a great friend and benevolent
father. The authority figures of my conditioning then
somehow lost their power, that spell was broken, and in
its place a regime of spiritual friendship was installed.
Since that day, over thirty years ago, that simple
phrase, ‘adaptability is my practice’, has resonated through
and has informed my experience of community life. I
have used it myself over and over as a reminder to accom-
modate rather than to contend, and it has frequently been
advice that I have given to others – usually by saying,
‘Adaptability is the Way, is the key to happiness.’
Even though I suspect that Luang Por does not even
remember having said it, this small jewel of Dhamma was
the catalyst that triggered my total faith in him as a teach-
er and also the profound friendship that has flourished
throughout this time. It was the briefest of encounters
but, for me, it changed the world forever. ☞

Luang Por has a way where he says things that I have heard
or read many times, but somehow when Luang Por says it, it
sinks in. That I cannot explain, but only have gratitude for it.
Anagarika Wei-Sen

Near the end of my engineering course I began
visiting the university Careers Office, mainly
to look in the ‘Alternatives’ folder, but always
finding it disappointingly empty. After several
months of attending a meditation group I was
invited to a Wesak celebration at the Samatha
Centre in Manchester and went along, not really
knowing what it was all about. That was the first
time that I saw Ajahn Sumedho – and something
in me began to realize, on a subliminal level at
first, that I might have found the alternative I
was looking for. Indeed, a couple of years later,
while visiting the recently opened Chithurst
Monastery, I approached Ajahn Sumedho to
ask if I could join the Sangha. He said, ‘So you
don’t want to be a millionaire’, and I entered the
monastic community soon thereafter.
Ajahn Chandapalo
Luang Por Sumedho has not only been an immense inspiration to the American Sangha at Abhayagiri, but truly was its founder. Even in the early days when he would visit the West Coast to see his family, Luang Por also met the Chinese Master Hsuan Hua who said that they had practised together as monks previous to this life. From that point of view, the beginnings of Abhayagiri Monastery were in those past lives. It was the donation of Californian land that Master Hua gave to Luang Por Sumedho on his death bed which became the opportunity for Abhayagiri to be born. Master Hua had such deep respect for Luang Por, he not only told his Western students to look to Luang Por as a teacher and role model after he passed away but even asked if Luang Por would consider being abbot and ‘Grand Master Teacher’ of his very large monastery, the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

Luang Por has helped spread Buddhism around the world and has touched many, not only in Europe where he has lived so long or in America where he was born, but in other countries as well. That he has been able to take the teachings he received from the Thai forest tradition and translate them into a form which people of other cultures could not only understand but be willing to devote their whole life to, is an astounding and rare thing in this world. Indeed, it was through listening to the Dhamma teachings of Luang Por Sumedho that led my own mother’s faith in Buddhism to develop. Now she is a Buddhist nun. Many thanks to Luang Por Sumedho!

Gunavuddho Bhikkhu
I first saw Luang Por in January 1982 at a ceremony in Hampstead, London. I was struck by the openness and warmth of his countenance and the feeling of well-being he exuded. Strangely enough he reminded me of no one more than my father. Except, in this case, I thought to myself, this was a man who had made the right choices in life.

Then, it must have been a Saturday morning in February 1982, the first time I ever visited Chithurst. I met Ajahn Munindo in the hall and we had a brief conversation. When he said that monks could not use money, it made a deep impression. I went into the Reception Room where Luang Por was sitting with a group of lay supporters and fielding questions. As I crossed the back of the room he looked straight at me and said, ‘I had a problem with my parents too’. This came out of nowhere and I felt amazed as no one had ever recognized that in me before. In the course of the exchanges that followed I sat at the back paying close attention while people plied him with questions. The back and forth nature of the exchanges, the fluency and integrity of the answers and his technique of highlighting concerns common to us all left me with the feeling that I was witnessing a film rather than something in real life. To be as good as it was, I felt, it surely must have been scripted!

Ajahn Dhammanando

Mark Lewis managed the organization & volunteers for the event

The ‘Tuesday Group’ of Thai friends who offered & organized the 2010 Amaravati Kathina
In May 1978 there was not much money available and Ajahn Sumedho wished to go to Bodhinyanarama, Tournon, France, to pick up Ven. Santacitto who was staying there with Ajahn Nyanadharo.

The cheapest way seemed to be to take the train and ferry to Paris and hitch-hike down to Lyon. I was keeping the Eight Precepts but still wearing ordinary clothes, including a suit in order to look smart when travelling with monks or visiting estate agents on their behalf.

For some reason the train from Calais to Paris was very full, so that night we stayed in the luggage compartment. Ajahn Sumedho was perfectly at ease. He said it was like all night sittings in Wat Pah Pong.

We made it to the station and before heading off to hitch-hike I bought some food from a local greengrocers and we sat outside Notre Dame Cathedral having our meal.

The hitch-hiking was not successful. Me in my suit trying to look smart and unthreatening, and Ajahn Sumedho in his robes. We were not ordinary hitch-hikers, and anyway in France 'l’autostop' is not usually easy.

Eventually we took the train.

Ajahn Vajiro
The Hampstead Vihara had closed down in the early 1970s so I was sitting on my own every day at home. It then entered my head that I would like to go to Thailand and train for one year as a samanera. Being married with young children I was not able to go for longer. My wife was kind enough to give her permission provided I had saved enough money to provide for my family for that year.

A little booklet then came my way where I read of a new monastery in Thailand which had an American abbot. ‘Great,’ I thought, ‘no problem with the language.’ Back then there weren’t all the fancy meditation info magazines there are now.

I had begun saving for the trip when it occurred to me to ring the Hampstead Vihara to see if anything was going on there or if it was still vacant.

‘Hello – is that Paul?’ was the answer. ‘Is that Gerry Rollason?’ Gerry was an old friend I hadn’t heard from for a few years. ‘Yes its Gerry. I’ve been looking for your number. There’s an American abbot here who has just come from Thailand.’ On hearing this I rushed up to the vihara and was greeted by Ajahn Sumedho, and Venerables Khemadhammo, Anando and Viradhammo. This was the abbot in the booklet. I told them of my plan, and turning to Ajahn Sumedho said ‘I think this is a case of the mountain coming to Muhammad.’

At that time I was working and staying in London during the week and returning to my family in the country at the weekends. Luang Por was very kind in suggesting that I could stay at the vihara when I was in London rather than at my workplace. So began my 35-year friendship with the mountain.

Ajahn Vimalo
INTERNATIONAL TORT PA BA ~ ALMSGIVING CEREMONY
at Cittaviveka Buddhist Monastery
19 June 2011
Everyone very welcome
Details available from the monastery closer the time

LAY RESIDENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES AT THE MONASTERIES

Amaravati
Amaravati could use volunteer help (grants available upon request) managing the following areas:
Grounds & Maintenance
If you think you may be interested, please contact the Monastery Secretary at monasterysecretary(at)amaravati(dot)org

Cittaviveka
Cittaviveka is similarly looking for a long-term resident who would be responsible for looking after Maintenance
If you think you may be interested, please contact Cittaviveka Monastery at the address on the back or phone (0173) 081 4986

Harnham
And Aruna Ratangiri Monastery is looking for a Guest House Manager
Please contact the monastery for details at (01661) 881 612 or www.ratanagiri.org.uk » Contact Us

Glossary – Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter
Please note: 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
avijja: Unawareness, ignorance; the root cause of suffering
bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk
Buddha: Awakened One, the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma
dukkha: suffering, discontent, distress
Dhamma: The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha
duti: 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

sama: One who has entered the Holy Life; religious recluse or wanderer
samanā-sañña: The way a samana sees and acts in the world
samanera: A Buddhist monk
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
vihāra: A monastic dwelling
Vinaya: The monastic discipline

Helping with publications
At Amaravati Publications, in addition to the help we could use in transitioning our books to e-books (see the note in Grapevine on p. 29) we are currently looking for volunteers with the requisite skills to help us in the following areas:
database skills • proofreading • editing • typesetting
foreign language translations & checking
If you wish to offer any help with these, please contact Nick Halliday at abmpublications(at)gmail(dot)com
AMARAVATI

Family events
Rainbows Weekend: 29 April – 2 May
June Weekend: 24–26 June
Summer Camp: 20–28 August
Young Persons’ Retreat: 11–13 Nov.
Creative Retreat: 9–11 Dec. (age 18+)

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

Lay events 2011
Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association: ALBA is a group of lay practitioners closely associated with Amaravati; they hold practice events throughout the year.

More information, and details of their activities can be found via their website: www.buddhacommunity.org

Buddhist Women’s Network
A women’s practice group associated with Amaravati; they hold practice events throughout the year.

To receive the newsletter by email or post, write to the monastery or email: jenniejepson(at)yahoo(dot)co.uk

Lay residential opportunities
There are, or may soon be, openings for lay residential positions at Amaravati for people willing to help in the following two areas: Grounds & Maintenance. If you have an interest to work, live and practice with the monastic community for up to a year or more, please write to the Monastery Secretary at Amaravati or email: monasterysecretary(at)amaravati(dot)org

PUBLICATIONS

Helping with e-books
The Sangha could use some help with transferring our publications to digital formats, and with proofreading the results.

With the advent of popular e-readers such as the Kindle and the iPad an opportunity now exists to freely distribute Dhamma books easily and at no cost to more people than ever before.

If you’re interested in being part of this, please let us know if you think you can help with any of the following:

a) scanning physical books using Optical Text Recognition (OCR) equipment;
b) proofreading digital text files against the original books;
c) formatting the digital texts in the appropriate formats (mostly EPUB).

You can contact the Amaravati Publications Secretary, Nick Halliday, at: abmpublications(at)gmail(dot)com

MONASTERY NEWS

Where to find news and announcements from the monasteries
Now that the Forest Sangha Newsletter is published about once a year, much of the news from the monasteries formerly provided here on the Grapevine is instead published elsewhere. Below is a guide to how you can get news from many of the monasteries. The postal address and contact details for each monastery can be found on the back page.

‘Portal’ website: www.forestsangha.org

www.forestsangha.org acts as a portal to Ajahn Chah branch monasteries with non-Thai resident Sanghas. News and announcements can be found on the Current News page, as well as by following the links under Newsletters.

Amaravati

Announcements can be found on the website, www.amaravati.org.

Amaravati now has its own quarterly bulletin, called Looking Ahead (also available on the website). Subscribe to receive this by email or by post, at Looking Ahead, Amaravati, or at abmnews(at)amaravati(dot)org

Aruna Ratanagiri (Harnham)

Look under News, on the website www.ratanagiri.org.uk for links to a blog, announcements, retreats and more, including the monastery newsletter, Hilltop. To receive Hilltop by post or by email, write to Sangha Office, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, or email sangha(at)ratanagiri(dot)org.uk

Cittaviveka (Chithurst)

For an email containing Cittaviveka’s seasonal newsletter, write to the monastery or go to the website www.cittaviveka.org where you can subscribe on the News webpage. Other events are also announced there.

Hartridge (Devon)

See the Announcements page on their website: hartridgemonastery.org. Hartridge periodically produces a newsletter: contact the monastery to sign up to receive it.

Dhammapala (Switzerland)

In addition to announcements posted on their German-language website dhammapala.org, Dhammapala produces an annual newsletter available in German, English, French and Thai. Download it from the website, or to subscribe write to the monastery or email info(at)dhammapala(dot)ch

Santacittarama (Italy)

Santacittarama has a website with an English as well as Italian version (a Thai version is in the works): santacittarama.org. News can be found there as well as a digital newsletter; to subscribe to this, email the monastery at sangha(at)santacittarama(dot)org

Bodhinyanarama (New Zealand)

For news and announcements and to download their newsletter, go to Bodhinyanarama’s website: www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz. To receive the newsletter by email or post, write to the monastery or email sangha.nz(at)gmail(dot)com

Abhayagiri (USA)

Updated news and announcements can be found on Abhayagiri’s website, www.abhayagiri.org, where you can also read or download their newsletter, Fearless Mountain, and apply to be put on their postal or emailing list (you can also write to the monastery for this).
Please note that the Amaravati Retreat Schedule is no longer published first in this newsletter. If you wish to receive the very first posting of each year's schedule of retreats, please subscribe to receive Looking Ahead by email or post (see p. 3) or check via the RC website at www.amaravati.org

### Amaravati Retreats

**Retreat Schedule 2011**

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<td>6–15 May</td>
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<td>6 Days</td>
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*Participants must have previously attended a 10-day retreat

- Fully booked – waiting list in operation
- Fully booked for women, places available for men
- Fully booked for men, places available for women

We encourage applications throughout the year for all retreats with a waiting list in operation, as cancellations can occur – please visit www.amaravati.org > Retreat Centre > Schedule or phone for updates nearer the time of the retreat.

### General Guidelines

All weekend retreats are suitable to people new to meditation or retreats. 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

Please consider the retreat dates and your availability carefully before booking, to avoid cancellations. 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 supply an email address for correspondence. Bookings cannot be made over the phone.

### Start and Finish Times

Registration is from 4.00–7.00 p.m. on the first day of the retreat. Weekend retreats end at 4.00 p.m., 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 welcomed at the end of the retreat.

### Contact Information

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

Email: retreats(at)amaravati(dot)org Tel.: (0)1442 843 239

Skype: amaravati.retreat.centre

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

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**Meditation Retreats**

**Kusala House Retreats 2011**

- **Mixed Retreat 22–25 April** Led by Ajahn Tiradhammo
- **Mixed Retreat 22–28 May** Led by Ajahn Vimalo
- **Mixed Retreat 3 July–9 July** Led by Ajahn Anando
- **Men’s Retreat 3–7 August** Led by Ajahn Punnyo
- **Women’s Retreat 2–6 September** Led by Ajahn Candasisiri
- **Sutta Study Days with Peter Harvey** 10 April, 11 Sep., 30 Oct.
  9.30 to 16.00, with a shared vegetarian lunch.
- **Sunday Pali Classes for Beginners** Four Sundays from 22 May through 12 June
  Taught by Ven. Vinitha from Hartridge Monastery.
  For more information visit our website: www.ratanagiri.org.uk

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: kusalaevents(at)ratanagiri(dot)org.uk

or by phone at +44 (0120) 728-3361

or see: www.kusalahouse.org

**Introduction to Meditation**

Workshops at Amaravati

Every Saturday afternoon, 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
Groups and contacts

The list below includes people who have had contact with the Sangha over the years, who in most cases sponsor regular sitting groups in their area. Please note that the Sangha does not explicitly endorse or take responsibility for any of these people or their activities.

England

Bath  Anne Armitage  (01225) 859217
Banbury  Sarah Wallis  (01295) 278744
Bedford  David Stubbs  (01234) 720892
Berkshire  Anthea West  (01189) 798101
Brentwood  Richard Burch  (01277) 626225
Brighton – Bodhi Garden (www.bodhi garden.org): David Glendining  (01273) 723378
Bristol  Lisa Daix  (0117) 935 0272
Cambridge  Meg Clarke  (01223) 424357
Canterbury  Charles Watters  (01227) 463342
Carlisle  Jean Nelson  (01228) 546259
Chichester  Tony Halter  (01243) 672126
Cookham, Maidenhead  Emily Toma lin or David Lillywhite  (01628) 810083

Hemel Hempstead – Bodhinyana Group: Chris Ward  (01442) 890034
Kendal – Buddhist Group of Kendal–bgkt(at)etherway(dot)net

London

London Buddhist Society, 58 Eccleston Square, London SW1  (0207) 834 5858
London Hampstead  Caroline Randall  (0208) 348 0537
Ann Booth  (0207) 485 0505
London West  Nick Carroll  (07973) 372 391
Maidstone – Alokabodhi Buddhist Group: Shirley  (01622) 203751 or Tim  (01622) 726414
Newcastle  Ian Plagaro-Neill  (0191) 469 2778
Newent-Gloucestershire  John Teire  (01531) 821902
e-mail: john.teire(at)virgin(dot)net
Newmarket  www.bodhimanda.org

Richard Prangnell & Rosie Hitchins  (01638) 603286
rprangnell(at)gmail(dot)com

Norwich  Robert Coggan  (01953) 451741
Penzance  Lee  (01736) 799170
Portsmouth  Medhavi  (02392) 732280
Redruth  Vanessa  (01209) 214031
Sheffield  Greg Bradshaw  (0114) 2621559
e-mail: greg.bradshaw(at)btclick(dot)com

South Dorset  Barbara Cohen (Sati-sati)  (01305) 786821
Southampton  Robert Elliot  (02380) 612838
Steyning, Sussex  Jayanti  (01903) 812130
Stroud  John Groves  (07967) 777742
Surrey-Woking  Rocana  (01483) 761398
Taunton  Annie Fisher  (01278) 475245
Tonnes  James Whelan  (01803) 865667

Outside England

Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre (+353) 61 367 073
Cork, Ireland  Paddy Boyle  (+353) 21 462 2964
Dublin  Rupert Westrup  (+353) 01 280 2832
Edinburgh  Neil Howell  (0131) 226 5044
Glasgow  James Scott  (0141) 637 9731
Machynlleth, Wales  Angela Llewellyn  (01655) 501 1350

Pembroke shire, S. Wales

Peter & Barbara (Subhadra) Jackson  (01239) 820790
A Coruña, Spain  David Williams  (+34) 981 432 718

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>NEW</th>
<th>HALF</th>
<th>FULL</th>
<th>HALF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>4 (Tue)</td>
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<td>27 (Thu)</td>
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<td>February</td>
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<td>18 (Fri)</td>
<td>26 (Sat)</td>
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<td>March</td>
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<td>19 (Sat)</td>
<td>27 (Sun)</td>
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<td>April</td>
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<td>11 (Mon)</td>
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<td>10 (Tue)</td>
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<td>30 (Thu)</td>
<td>8 (Fri)</td>
<td>15 (Fri)</td>
<td>23 (Sat)</td>
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<td>7 (Sun)</td>
<td>14 (Sun)</td>
<td>22 (Mon)</td>
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<td>12 (Wed)</td>
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<td>18 (Fri)</td>
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<td>Nov./Dec.</td>
<td>25 (Fri)</td>
<td>3 (Sat)</td>
<td>10 (Sat)</td>
<td>18 (Sun)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Magha Puja  @ Vesakha Puja  @ Asalha Puja  & Pavarana Day

Wesak & Kathina Days

2011/2554

Vesakha Puja falls this year on 17 May. Wesak Days are the days many of the monasteries arrange to celebrate the occasion with lay supporters.

Amaravati (Hertfordshire)

Wesak: 22 May  * Kathina: 6 Nov.

Cittaviveka (W. Sussex)

Wesak: 22 May  * Kathina: 30 Oct.

Harnham (Northumberland)


Hartridge (Devon)


Dhammapala (Switzerland)


Sancticittarama (Italy)


Bodhinyanarama (New Zealand)


Abhayagiri (USA)

Associated Monasteries

BRITAIN

Amaravati Monastery
St Margarets, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, HERTS. HP1 3BZ
Tel: +44 (0)144 284 2455
Fax: (0)144 284 3721
Retreats: (0)144 284 3239
www.amaravati.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust

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

Cittaviveka
Chithurst Buddhist Monastery
Chithurst, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 5EU
Tel: +44 (0173) 081 4986
Fax: (0173) 081 7334
www.cittaviveka.org
Stewards: English Sangha Trust

Hartridge Monastery
Upottery, Honiton, Devon EX14 9QE
Tel: +44 (0140) 489 1251
www.hartridgemonastery.org
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 Waldberg, CH 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: 033 / 6752 100
Fax: 033 / 6752 241
www.dhammapala.org
Stewards: Dhammapala

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: Sanghata Foundation

AUSTRIAN

Buddha Bodhivana
Monastery
780 Woods Point Road,
East Warburton, Victoria 3799
Tel: +61 (0)3 359 665 999
Fax: +61 (0)3 359 665 998
Stewards: Victoria Sangha Association

Vimokkarama Hermitage
PO Box 152 Kallista
Victoria, 3971

Dhammagiri Forest Hermitage
10 Ben Varden Avenue
Kholo, QLD 4306
Tel: +61 7 3201-2041
Fax: +61 7 3201 2044
www.dhammagiri.org.au

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 2433
+64 (0)9 236 6816
vimutti.atba(at)gmail(dot)com
www.vimutti.org.nz
Stewards: Auckland Theravada Buddhist Association

THAILAND

Wat Pah Nanachat
Bahn Bung Wai,
Amper Warin,
Ubon Rajathani 34310
www.watpahnanachat.org

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

For more resources and information, please also see the Sangha portal website:
www.forestsangha.org