NEWS
FROM MONASTERIES

Abhayagiri  Pg 8
Chithurst  Pg 10
Santacittarama  Pg 12
Amaravati  Pg 14
Harnham  Pg 16
Bodhinyanarama  Pg 18
Hartridge  Pg 19

ARTICLES:
The potential of being human  Pg 3
Fascinating tools  Pg 7
Ajahn Vajiro takes leave of Amaravati  Pg 17
Nature’s Way – news from the Sīladharā Sangha  Pg 20
Milntuim – a monastic residence for nuns  Pg 21
Reflections from a mountain valley  Pg 22
Obituary of Ajahn Maha Amorn  Pg 24
Abandoning the unwholesome, cultivating the wholesome  Pg 26
Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapalo receive upajjhāya status  Pg 28

INFORMATION:

Retreats  Pg 2 & 30
Lunar Calendar  Pg 6
Groups and Contacts  Pg 31
Grapevine  Pg 31
Glossary of Pali terms  Pg 25
The Forest Sangha Newsletter

Forest Sangha Newsletter represents the monasteries founded by Luang Por Sumedho, with an emphasis on those in Britain. It is currently published 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 email notification list by emailing fsn-mailer at amaravati dot org or writing to Forest Sangha Newsletter, Amaravati (full monastery address on the back page).

KUSALA HOUSE RETREATS 2012

Kusala House is a lay retreat facility associated with the Theravadan Buddhist Monastery of Aruna Ratanagiri and is situated in the hamlet of Harnham, Northumberland.

Mixed Retreat 13–15 April
Led by Ajahn Tiradhammo

Mixed Retreat 18–20 May
Led by Ajahn Kāruniko

Mixed Retreat 3–9 June
Led by Ajahn Kalyāno

Mixed Retreat 5–11 August
Led by Ajahn Abhinando

Mixed Retreat 24–30 September
Led by Ajahn Puñño

Limited bookings - Please note that it is monastery policy that a maximum of two retreats may be booked in any one year.

For more information or to book a place on any of these events, contact Kath Jones on landline: 0120 7283 361, mobile: 0770 7621 717, or email: kathannejones at gmail dot com.

Kusala House, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, UK
www.kusalahouse.org.uk

WESAK & KATHINA 2012

Vesakha Puja falls this year on 4 June. Wesak Days are the days many of the monasteries arrange to celebrate the occasion with lay supporters.

AMARAVATI (HERTFORDSHIRE)
Wesak: 3 June • Kathina: 25 Nov.

CITTAVIVEKA (W. SUSSEX)
Wesak: 27 May • Kathina: 4 Nov.

HARNHAM (NORTHUMBERLAND)
Wesak: 3 June • Kathina: 11 Nov.

HARTRIDGE (DEVON)
Wesak: 3 June • Kathina: 18 Nov.

DHAMMAPALA (SWITZERLAND)
Wesak: 20 May • Kathina: 18 Nov.

SANTACITRAMA (ITALY)
Wesak: 27 May • Kathina: 11 Nov.

BODHINYANARAMA (NEW ZEALAND)
Wesak: 27 May • Kathina: TBA

ABHAJAGIRI (USA)
Wesak: 4 June • Kathina: 4 Nov.

Anumodana

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Cover photo – Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek on the London Eye.

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Contact – Write to Newsletter Editor, Amaravati, or email: editor at amaravati dot org.
The potential of being human

The following is the summary of a Dhamma talk offered by Luang Por Liem at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery on Saturday, 21 May 2011, the evening before the Wesak Day celebrations. It is adapted from the English translations that Ajahn Kevali provided directly after Luang Por spoke in Thai.

So we need to give this matter some consideration in order to improve our capacity for being aware, being present.

Being a human is a condition that is really conducive and helpful for understanding and developing our lives by seeing things in an unobstructed way. It’s as if light and brightness come to be and arise through our correct understanding, through the right view that we are able to cultivate as a human being. As the Buddha says: ‘Natthi paññā sammā ābhā – There is no light that equals wisdom.’ Wisdom, or right view, arises through being present, because it is in the present when all causes and effects come together. Living with awareness in the present thus is truly conducive to the cultivation of beneficial qualities.

Today we recall the arising of a special human being who fully saw and understood, who had full awareness and knowledge of things as they are – knowledge about life in such a way that he found true coolness and peace in himself. The being whose birth we commemorate today is called, conventionally, the Buddha, but what we actually remember is the arising of true knowledge in this world.

Buddha is a name that translates as ‘knowing and seeing’, having full awareness: the Awakened One who knows and sees. The One Who Knows – Poo Roo in Thai – refers to the quality of awareness. And knowing and seeing from this state of awareness is a great support for us, just as the surface of the planet Earth supports us in our life, whether we are standing, sitting, walking or lying down. We are always grounded in a way of viewing the world with awareness, understanding and seeing things clearly.

Knowing and seeing means to have mindfulness, sati, which is an innate quality human beings are equipped with that makes it possible for life to be of benefit. The Buddha mentioned sati and sampajañña as the two dhammas that are more helpful than any others, and called them ‘dhammas that are of great aid and support’. Sati means mindfulness and sampajañña means clear awareness. These two qualities arise when we are in the present moment, when we are ‘doing our duty’ by paying attention and cultivating understanding of the world and of life. They are dhammas that give rise to right view and right understanding.

Recollecting the birth, the enlightenment and the...
The potential of being human... (Continued from page 3)

final passing away of the Buddha shows the great development along the path towards the final attainment of peace, shade and coolness in a human life. This is because of the relentless, careful and heedful efforts of one human being in relating to the world. This world is composed of both external phenomena, like the body, health and physical aspects of life that we need to look after, and the internal qualities which we call the nāma dhammas, the qualities of the mind. Our task is to relate to both of these in a safe way without giving rise to dangers and disadvantages.

The way we relate to the world more or less focuses on our feelings and emotions, our mental disposition towards the world – the ārammana – whether they are positive or negative. The Buddha referred to this in his teachings as kāmasukhallikānuyogo – being bound up with the pleasures of the sensual world, and attakilamathānuyoga, being bound up with the negativity of the world. The Buddha described negativity and positivity as two extremes, which when followed will lead us to a low place. They are dhammas that lack an inner stronghold. They are the mental states of a puthujjana, an unenlightened, worldly being. It is not the path of a Noble One, an Enlightened being, to pursue those paths that are either negative or positive.

In order to understand phenomena that arise in the world of our mind, our emotions and feelings, we need to have mindfulness and carefully look and see the stream of change in the world and how it constantly makes us feel either delight and happiness or sadness and negativity. We understand: even delight and happiness, the things we get carried away with in the world, are limited, they are not the perfect way. We see that walking the way of the world, delighting in pleasurable things is actually not peaceful. One builds up heat and steam. Sense-pleasures that people find attractive are actually an accumulation of a sense of heat and agitation. Being bound up and infatuated with the sensual world doesn’t lead to freedom. One can say one gets bound up with wrong understanding – micchā ditthi – an unskilful way of relating to the world. Such views rule the world. Getting carried away by sensual pleasures through wrong understanding is what actually governs the world for most people.

So we need to build up a firm basis in seeing through these things, developing firmness and austereness which the Buddha called tapa – austerity or a certain groundedness and asceticism in our practice. Then we can look at the world in a way where we immediately see the mood swings and emotions of our mind. We observe how our mind reacts and relates to the world and understand how to get it to relax and feel relief from all its passions. How we do this is by grounding ourselves in mindfulness.

Mindfulness and clear comprehension also need a firm base, something in which to be grounded, in order to be able to fulfil their role as two of the most important qualities that lead to awakening. For grounding ourselves in mindfulness, the Buddha advises us to start with the physical world – the rūpa-dhamma – to have our mindfulness directed towards this body, the body that we all know as a fathom-long carcass, a certain measure long and wide, weighty. We can contemplate it as merely being a part of nature, with all its components and elements arising and performing their duty naturally. As we all know, earth arises naturally, as does water, fire and wind. They are all elements according to nature, and they combine together and form something that we then call the body. It is part of our practice to focus our awareness and mindfulness on the physical appearance of life, seeing that the body is nothing other than the body, that in itself it isn’t anything else, nothing more. Seeing that the body is simply a physical form of nature we develop the quality of distancing ourselves from it, of feeling secluded and detached from the body, which is called kāyaviveka. We see that nature simply does its duty: all things simply arise, exist and cease. Understanding this process of nature we experience peace of mind. We experience a reduction of heat and the alleviation of the delusions that usually carry our moods into liking and disliking.

So we ground ourselves in mindfulness of the body, to enable us to experience happy states of mind, an experience of feeling at ease, not delighting in or being averse to anything. We are peaceful, we are relaxed and at ease. This is what is referred to when we talk about the the qualities of the Buddha as being the one who knows, who is aware, bright and radiant. It is about seeing how
The world arises and walking the good path – sugato, being undeluded by the world, not getting carried away with it, and walking in a way that leads to understanding. Having mindfulness as a basis of understanding our body and mind, we don’t deviate from the truth as it appears in nature.

Knowing and seeing in this way relies on our continued effort in developing mindfulness. Mindfulness is a support for practice, creating a sense of immunity against worldly dangers and difficulties. But this needs constant caution and a sense of being alert, not to allow our mindfulness to slip, especially when we’re in contact with other human beings, the media, or with other sensory input. This is when we have to be very careful. The āyatana – the sense-spheres: the faculty to see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think – give rise to the world. This constantly brings feelings of delight and aversion if we’re not careful and don’t understand how the sense bases, eye, ear and so forth, are part of nature, and function merely according to it. Seeing things in this way, we should not give rise to feelings of delight and aversion. Be very careful with the mind and heart, and understand how external input conditions our reactions.

The heart itself – the mind – has no form, but it manifests itself in our feelings towards the world, feelings of happiness and suffering. We need to make a conscious effort to stay in the middle, to walk the Middle Way, not delighting in things and being prone to delusions; not to follow a path that is constantly lacking, like fire that never gets enough fuel. We need to be very careful not to lose our mindfulness, especially when the mind experiences objects that are likely to give rise to desires or aversion. We need to have a mind that relates very carefully to the things that arise in the world, having mindfulness and right view – this is the ēkayāna, the single way, the way of mindfulness, where one has ekaggatā citta – a one-pointed mind – and does not look at the world in the way of a fool. Like the Dhammapada verse says ‘Ethā passathimāṁ lokam cittām rājarathūpamaṁ yattha bālā visidantī naththi sango vijānaṁ – not to be attracted to the royal chariots and the decorated ornamental things in the world.’ We should be consciously alert to how these things cause delusion in us. We should be a bit suspicious and cautious about these things, and not get attracted and pulled by them, because this ‘pull’ leads us to suffering.

One dhamma that aids our mindfulness is building up a sense of restraint, the saṅvāra dhamma – to be composed and focused; not heedless, diverse or deviating from being grounded in the present. This needs cultivation and development of ourselves, in order for us to be able to study and see the experiences that life brings.

As a means of restraining our mind we focus on the breath, we practise ānāpānasati as a method of building up an immunity towards the outer world. For example, the body has to build up its immune system to endure cold and heat in order to stay healthy. Similarly, we build up mindfulness in an uninterrupted way by focusing on the breath. We see this practice of mindfulness as a method of staying in the present moment without interruption, whether we are sitting, walking, standing or lying down. It may seem that this is quite difficult and troublesome, and if we’re not skilled, or don’t have enough experience, it may bring frustration. But continually developing mindfulness brings us the facility to adapt and increase our acceptance of the world, and we are gradually able to derive benefits from our experience. We are able to see the sankhāras – the proliferations and delusions created by the mind – understanding them as false, as a useless, fake reality. We see our passions for the world of delusions, reducing them gradually by seeing through them. It’s like watching a movie, we could either get carried-away with the reality on the screen that the movie tries to suggest to our mind, or we could simply look at the plastic strip that the film was made of, seeing that actually there’s nothing happening there.

So look at the mind, how it is deluded by both wholesome and unwholesome qualities. We see how these qualities constantly change, but without a sense of having illusions around them. In fact the mind is simply the mind. We see this with a one-pointed mind, becoming peaceful and secluded and detached from whatever objects arise in the mind, developing cittaviveka, seclusion of the mind, being focused and equanimous in this way whether we’re sitting, walking, standing or lying down – practising like the sugata, going the good way.

Once we become more skilled with this practice, it will give rise to brightness. Darkness doesn’t have power over light. Darkness has to cease whenever light pervades. We arrive at a feeling of inner satisfaction, without suffering, being fully imbued with a sense of joy and rapture, a sense of goodness within our hearts, which we call pīti, an energy that does not depend on external phenomena or illusions: it comes from inside. The illusions of other human beings can’t fool us because we’re detached, secluded. We step back from the world with all its deceptive, man-made creations. We feel detached and cooled from the heat of all the illusions that the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind create. We come to a sense of purity, like cleanliness, spotlessness and a sense of being at ease, reducing the heat that usually builds up in our minds, alleviating the drunkenness that carries away beings in the world. We feel detached from...
all kinds of defiled phenomena, which is called upadhi-viveka, seeing the world with the qualities of a samana, a peaceful one, with the qualities of a true human being, which is the highest benefit that nothing in the world can possibly match.

So mindfulness has enormous importance in our practice and is something that we constantly need to uphold and support, having a sense of sikkhā – walking a training path that is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end, where goodness arises. The experience that we have when walking the path in this way compares to nothing external. The ways of this inner happiness are beyond that of the world. ‘Natthi santi paramaṁ sukhaṁ – no happiness compares with that of a peaceful mind.’ We experience this in every moment, and the truths of life can’t shake this happiness. Just like the Buddha himself stated: ‘Anything that comes together will also be torn apart.’ The Buddha was able to state this without being troubled by these truths about reality. He was able to see the reality of life in a peaceful way.

Today we’ve come together for a special occasion, all being blessed with the opportunity to follow this model of the Buddha as somebody who truly knows the world – the lokavidū – the Knower of the World. So we need to adapt our practice to following a path that really does know the world. Time will do its duty, by its passing, as it is normal in the round of births, so we also need to do our duty towards life by seeing the value of being a true human being, a child of the Buddha, a child of the Dhamma, and a child of the Ariya Sangha – a follower of the Noble Ones who have attained peaceful and truly good states of mind. We’re following in the footsteps of the Noble Ones wherever we go, following good people in this country of ‘gentle-men’, giving rise to light whenever there is darkness. We know that wherever there is dirtiness there needs to be cleanliness and purity, and wherever there are states of darkness there needs to be light as well. It cannot be that there is only dukkha and sukha – suffering and happiness. There also has to be a place where there is no dukkha or sukha. As the Buddha said, ‘No other happiness equals the happiness that is beyond happiness and suffering.’

Today I wanted to offer you some reflections for seeing the value of being a true human being, one who takes on the task of developing his or her human potential to the full. As the Buddha praised, ‘To be a human being is one of the greatest gains.’ Being a human is indeed very special, and all of us have the opportunity to contemplate this path that we all can walk. I offer my wholehearted wish that all the goodness we create through our practice be a support for our faculties, our potentials and our spiritual values, so that they can be supreme aids in attaining to the happiness of peace and the realization of liberation.

1 Refers to England with its polite and well mannered culture known in Thai as ‘Mueang Poo Dee’.

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**LUNAR CALENDAR 2012**

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

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1 Magha Puja 2 Visakha Puja 3 Asalha Puja 4 Pavarana Day
What kind of world are we aware of right now? What is the feeling tone of what we are experiencing right now? We recite chants about the description of the five khandhas: the body and the mind, with its sensations and feelings, perceptions, thoughts and sense-consciousness. And yet, right now, what is the consciousness of what we are feeling or thinking? What is our world right now?

We can be easily carried away by the desire to perfect our tools in practice. It’s almost like we are focusing so much on the hammer we’ve forgotten the piece of wood that we are working on. We have many many tools in the practice and we get quite fascinated by them. We can actually forget what it is that we are addressing and lose the subtlety of life as it is in this moment. We are so concentrated on external things, like the breath, or focusing on getting our concentration right, or doubting the strength of our mindfulness – questioning, doubting – we can lose touch with the very material that these tools are meant to help us see clearly.

Sometimes we come to a monastery with a real sense of purpose, to later discover something very different. Perhaps we come to the monastery with the idea that we have to develop a self that will become a good Buddhist – kind or compassionate, or loving. In a way, we get into conflict with ourselves because reality is quite different. In fact, reality can be so different we hardly recognize ourselves. Perhaps you come to the monastery and discover that you experience yourself as somebody very different from that kind, loving, generous person that you wished to develop. On one level we want to be pure and loving, and not driven by sensual desires. We want to be respectful of each other, and then we discover these forces that we are so blind to sometimes.

For a long time we may think that ‘we’ are in charge of our life, and can feel quite guilty or blame ourselves when things do not work out. For example, how many times do we feel embarrassed about the way we behave? Even when nobody sees us. We can feel so embarrassed. This beautiful person that we hoped to become one day is suddenly raging about some silly thing. We think we are in charge, but as we keep on practicing we realize it’s really just blind habits – blind conditioning, blind responses. They are blind because they are acted upon before our mindfulness can even catch them.

When we are mindful, we are conscious, we can see clearly. But often habits are so strong, they catch us off guard and can manifest as a punch – punching our world, our reality. This is not always obvious as habits can be hidden behind a smile, an appearance of politeness. A punch can even look quite sweet!

So in our meditation practice we begin to see the details of our mind – what is happening right now? Am I at peace? Do I hate what is happening or not? Do I care for it, or not? Do I wish to be somewhere else? Do I force myself to be here? These details are not always acknowledged, and yet this is the material of our practice. The Buddha said: ‘I teach for those who know and those who see.’ They are very simple words, aren’t they? But for me it means a lot. If we don’t see our mind as it really is, there is nothing much we can do.
In 2011, at the conclusion of our three-month Winter Retreat period, Abhayagiri had the pleasure of hosting several senior monks in the Ajahn Chah lineage. During the last week in May, Ajahn Jayasāro made time for a much-appreciated visit to Abhayagiri. In addition to giving several formal Dhamma talks here, Ajahn Jayasāro generously made himself available for meeting with individuals and various small groups of monks and laypeople, Western and Asian.

Shortly after Ajahn Jayasāro’s departure, Abhayagiri was again buoyed up with a visit from Ajahn Viradhammo, abbot of Tisarana Monastery in Perth, Ontario. His approachable and informal demeanour allowed for surprisingly quick bonds of affection being formed between teacher and student. Inspired by talk of his experience learning the craft of card-weaving while looking after his mother, several monks here have since taken up this practical skill.

In addition to these visits, Abhayagiri also much appreciated the shorter visits from several other inspiring elders from our communities around the globe: Ajahn Chandako, abbot of Vimutti Forest Monastery in New Zealand; Ajahn Achalo, abbot of Wat Anandagiri, Thailand; and our familiar Ajahn Sudanto, abbot of the Pacific Hermitage, Washington. Recorded talks by these visiting elders are available on the Abhayagiri website at <http://www.abhayagiri.org/main/media/#talks>.

Over the last several months Abhayagiri welcomed the return of a variety of interested student groups: second-grade pupils from the local Waldorf school visited, sat in the full-lotus position (!), walked the Abhayagiri trails, and asked questions; a group of middle-school students from the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB) came for the afternoon as per tradition of the past few years; and during two days in June the monastery once again hosted the Spirit Rock Teen Weekend, with 15 teens voluntarily giving up ‘normal life’ for a short spell to come and practice with the monks.

As for older students, Luang Por Pasanno and several of the other Abhayagiri ajahns have been continuing to offer Dhamma instruction at various ongoing venues: day-long retreats at Spirit Rock Meditation Center; university classes at CTTB; tea and reflections at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery; guided meditations, Q & A and Dhamma reflections at various yoga studios; talks at the San Francisco Bay Area Thai monastery Wat Buddha-nusorn; and the offering of good wishes at the inauguration of the Mindfulness Care Center in San Francisco. In early August, as in years past, several monks, headed by Luang Por Pasanno, travelled to Spirit Rock to participate in their yearly, week-long Family Retreat.

In addition to going out and speaking with interested groups, the Abhayagiri community hosted others who chose to visit the monastery for a more immersive learning experience. A group of Dhamma Punx from Santa Cruz and San Jose visited and sat meditation with us for a weekend; the Abhayagiri-affiliated Upāsika Group had its annual ‘renewal day’ of dāna, sīla, and bhāvanā – generosity, virtue, and meditation; and the Buddhist Bike Pilgrimage, once again, made Abhayagiri the final stop on its almost 140-mile ride north from Spirit Rock.

In midsummer, Ajahn Yatiko, a Canadian monk who trained in Thailand and who has lived at Abhayagiri for the last three years, slowly walked his way south over 400 miles of coast to San Diego. In keeping with our monastic training rules he walked without money or food. With very few fixed plans, he stopped at various Buddhist temples and met with assorted lay meditation groups along the way. That, along with being spontaneously helped out by many dozens of strangers, enabled Ajahn Yatiko to survive the walk and reach...
his destination, Metta Forest Monastery, before returning to Abhayagiri for the relative stability of the Rains Retreat, which began in mid-July this year.

On the building front, construction has been completed on the monastery’s new, two-floor workshop. This space will provide a much needed central location for project planning and production. Also, two new ‘huts-on-wheels’ have been built atop the existing frames of former ageing mobile-huts.

A number of changes to the Abhayagiri Sangha took place last year. Early April saw the arrival of Ajahn Saññamo. Born in Canada, he ordained in Thailand and has spent the last 13 years living in Ajahn Chah branch monasteries there. In late April Anagārika Brian formally requested the sāmanera precepts (pabbajjā), receiving the name Khemako. In May Ven. Suvaco joined the community. He has spent the last few years training with Ajahn Sona at Sitavana Monastery in British Columbia, having been ordained as a bhikkhu by Luang Por Pasanno in an ordination ceremony held at Abhayagiri in 2008.

Later in the spring Ajahn Jotipālo returned to Abhayagiri to take up residence again after having spent the last few years living at monasteries in Canada and New Zealand. He will be living at Pacific Hermitage through the winter, acting as senior monk during the several months that Ajahn Sudanto will be sojourning in Thailand reconnecting with the Sangha there.

After several months of lay residency here, Jordan Van Nest and Wade Sanders have taken up the anagārika training. Anagārika Joe Ginsberg has taken on the further one-year sāmanera training and has thus been given the new name Pesalo (‘one of endearing virtue’). On the same evening, Sāmanera Suddhāso was given full bhikkhu ordination, with Luang Por Pasanno acting as preceptor. May these students of the Dhamma use this incredible opportunity well, and grow and learn in accordance with their highest aspirations.
Cittaviveka has always been a green place in many senses of the word. Situated in the most densely wooded county in southern England, it is blessed with Hammer Wood, which was the original gift that brought us out of London. Here is where the Forest Sangha first took root with the visit of Ven. Ajahn Chah in 1979; and here the first bhikkhus and sīladharā ordained by Ven. Ajahn Sumedho received the Going Forth. This year these roots received a welcome watering with visits from Luang Por Liem, Ajahn Chah’s successor as abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong, along with Luang Por Anek, Luang Por Sopha and some of our fellow Western monks based in Thailand.

So the lineage and the transmission continues. Last year we were pleased to welcome a new preceptor, Ajahn Amaro, who in his first official action supervised the Going Forth of five bhikkhus and a sāmanera on the ordination precinct (sīmā) that was established by Ven. Anandamaitreyya Mahanayaka in 1981.

Last year the monastery carried its maximum capacity with regards to the male community (currently 18 people of 14 nationalities!) and the nuns community took the opportunity to enjoy the superb facility of Rocana Vihara. During much of the year, work was going on for the new nuns’ Meditation Hall, which having received its flooring is on the verge of completion, and was good enough to be inaugurated by a group-sitting of laypeople and monastics on 8 October. Happily, it has underfloor heating, and as a boost to green principles, the old oil-powered heating system has been replaced with a more economical and eco-friendly system that uses wood pellets. The greening of Rocana also includes the recent siting of solar panels on its roof.

We are also beginning a project to establish solar panels beside Chithurst House so that with both of these solar sources, the monastery will be able to provide at least some of its own electricity. As the monastery already uses wood from Hammer Wood to heat the major buildings on the Main Site and is fed by water from its own well, we are able to use energy from replenishable sources and also keep utility costs down.

The cloister/covered walkway moved a few metres closer to completion with the construction of a main entrance surmounted by a bell-tower. This project has been undertaken by an international group of lay supporters who organize a yearly Tod Pha Pa (almsgiving ceremony) as a focus for both fundraising and for building up the sense of the wider lay community that centres itself on the monastery. As the spirit of kalyānamitta (spiritual friendship) is at the heart of the spiritual life, a building project which starts out as something material can encourage the heart in more far-reaching ways. This year’s Tod Pha Pa is on 17 June, Ajahn Chah’s birthday, so you are all warmly invited to commemorate the establishment of the Sangha in Britain in a way that encompasses informal and formal occasions. This Dhamma culture of morality, generosity, renunciation and meditation is for the greening of the heart. Despite economic ups and downs and global unrest, here at least it is flourishing still.

Venerable Ajahn Chah
News from Cittaviveka: Chithurst Buddhist Monastery

Cloister extension with bell tower (left); new meditation hall at Rocana Vihara (above); Ajahn Chah memorial stupa (below)
SANTACITTARAMA was honoured last year with a Royal Kathina – a first for Italy! – with a set of robes being offered on behalf of King Bhumibol (who celebrated his 84th birthday last year) by His Excellency the Ambassador of Thailand in Rome. The fact that about 700 calendars were handed out at the end of the ceremony gives some indication of the huge turnout. Bus-loads of the faithful – some travelling through the night – came from as far away as Milan, Venice and Naples. Italy and Thailand have had diplomatic relations that go back more than 140 years and, although there are not nearly as many Thai citizens living in Italy as in some other European countries, a large proportion of them are generous supporters of this monastery. We were also blessed by warm, sunny weather, and the presence of Tan Chao Khun Visuddhidhiraporn, as well as Ajahn Ariyasīlo from Amaravati and Tan Aruno (an Italian bhikkhu, previously Anagārika Gianni) from Chithurst.

Three months before Kathina we celebrated Asalha Puja, or Dhamma Day. Along with marking the start of the annual Rains Retreat, or Vassa, this occasion commemorates the Buddha’s first discourse, the ‘Setting in motion the wheel of Dhamma’, which was delivered to the five ascetics at the Deer Park of Isipatana (present-day Sarnath), two months after the Buddha’s Awakening.

During last year’s Vassa we had six bhikkhus in residence, with several Sangha members spending time away. Ajahn Suvaco was in Thailand and returned around Christmas, while Sāmanera Kovido is at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery near Newcastle until this spring. Tan Mahāpañño spent the three-month Vassa in self-retreat in the countryside of Emilia Romagna, and returned in time for the Kathina Ceremony.

Also joining us for the Vassa last year was Ajahn Prateep Guttadhammo, a Thai monk who has lived at Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand, as well as at Abhayagiri monastery in California. His intention was to stay at least a year, but he was asked to return to Thailand at the end of January for the official inauguration of the new meeting hall in his monastery. Tan Cittaviro, a German monk ordained in Thailand, also joined us for the Vassa.

Last summer Luang Por Sumedho spent a month in a mountain hermitage at 2,000 metres above sea level at the end of the Lys Valley in Valle d’Aosta, in the north-west corner of Italy. He was joined there by Ajahn Chandapālo and Ajahn Khemasiri (abbot of Dhammapala Monastery in Switzerland) on 27 July, Luang Por’s 77th birthday, when the property was formally offered to the Sangha by Boonchan and Maria Vittoria, a local Thai-Italian family. This is a very generous and useful
offering and will be a wonderful resource for the Sangha as a place of retreat and solitude in beautiful and quiet natural surroundings. We have named it Santaloka, which means ‘Realm of Peace.’

We were delighted to have Luang Por Sumedho here with us at Santacittarama for the first weekend of August (just days before he returned to Thailand) when he graciously agreed to give a talk in English (translated into Italian), as well as a talk in Thai the following day. This coincided with the anniversary of the death of Khun Natcharee Thananan, who was instrumental in the acquisition of the monastery property. Luang Por Sumedho had been spending several months in various places in Europe – Portugal, Croatia and Italy – in this new phase of his life free of responsibilities, so we were exceptionally fortunate to have had this opportunity to spend time with him and hear his teachings.

In January of last year Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapalo were in Thailand together, seeking approval from the Thai Sangha to be appointed as officially sanctioned preceptors (upajjhāya). This would authorize them to receive suitable candidates into the bhikkhu training. With Luang Por Sumedho having relinquished his role last year both as abbot of Amaravati and the upajjhāya for our European monasteries, our Sangha was in need of an officially recognized preceptor. The European elders agreed to propose both Ajahn Amaro, newly appointed abbot of Amaravati monastery, and Ajahn Chandapalo to fulfil this office, thus providing a geographic spread, with Ajahn Amaro based in England and Ajahn Chandapalo in Italy. This was accepted by the elders of the Ajahn Chah group of monasteries in Thailand, and by Somdet Buddhajahn, the acting Supreme Patriarch and the Mahathera Śamakorn, the ecclesiastical body which governs the Thai Sangha, of which we are a part.

Ajahn Amaro flew to Thailand in early July to receive the certificates from Luang Por Liem, abbot of Wat Nong Pah Pong, who had himself travelled to Bangkok with other senior monks to receive them from the secretary of Somdet Buddhajahn at Wat Saket (see photo on page 28). On 10 July at Chithurst monastery, these appointments were acknowledged by the Sangha and Ajahn Chandapalo received his certificate in the sīmā (ordination boundary) where he had been accepted into the Bhikkhu Sangha 29 years previously. The Sangha then proceeded to confer bhikkhu status on five candidates, with Ajahn Amaro as preceptor, along with one anagārika who was given the ‘going forth’ as a novice.
Although the Western calendar begins in January, the rhythm of our monastic year in one sense starts in April, after the annual Winter Retreat.

In the first week of April 2011, Amaravati hosted a gathering of many elders from our global collection of Western branch monasteries for their biannual Sangha meetings. Later that month there was a nun’s ordination, when Anagārikā Rupa was accepted into the Order of Sīladharā and received the Dhamma name Sister Khemakā (‘one who is composed’). We were honoured that Ven. Seelawimala, abbot of the London Buddhist Vihara, was able to come and preside over the ordination of his former pupil.

Amaravati’s Wesak celebration was held on Sunday, 22 May 2011. We were doubly pleased that Luang Por Liem, abbot of our main monastery in Thailand, Wat Nong Pah Pong, as well as Luang Por Anek, abbot of one of the main branch monasteries, Wat Pah Sai Ngam, were present and led the events of this special day (see Dhamma talks on pages 3 and 26).

Accompanying Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek was Ajahn Kevali, abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, who skilfully translated the numerous Dhamma teachings that the visiting elders offered, along with Ajahn Moshe and Ven. Asoko. Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek had not visited Amaravati for many years, so we were delighted that they had both the interest and time to bless us with their presence.

Another much-appreciated visit last spring was from Luang Por Sopha, abbot of Wat Kau Wan Chai Navarat, a branch monastery of Wat Nong Pah Pong. This was part of an intended tour of all the European branch monasteries. After the end of the Vassa, he returned to the UK and attended Kathina ceremonies at both Hartridge and Chithurst Monasteries, as well as the fortnightly recitation of the pātimokkha (bhikkhus’ rules of training) that was held at Amaravati on 26 October.

Apart from the visiting elders mentioned above, last year Amaravati was blessed by visits from a number of other elder monks from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Europe, the UK and North America. Other guest elders who visited Amaravati last spring were Ven. Seelawimala, abbot of London Buddhist Vihara; Ven. Pemasiri and Ven. Piyananda, both of whom are abbots of meditation centres in Kanduboda, Sri Lanka; Rev. Heng Sure, abbot of Berkeley Buddhist Monastery in California; Ajahn Sucitto, abbot of Chithurst Buddhist Monastery; Ajahn Munindo, abbot of Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery; and Ajahn Preecha Jutindharo, vice-abbot of Santacittarama Monastery in Italy, who led his first retreat here (in the Thai language).

The most recent elder to visit was Luang Por Pasanno, abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery in California, in his first visit to Amaravati since 2004. He, along with his mother Rhoda...
Perry and Abhayagiri lay resident Debbie Stamp, spent two weeks visiting Amaravati, Chithurst and Aruna Ratnagiri Monasteries. Luang Por Pasanno’s presence was greatly appreciated by both the resident Sangha and the lay community, and many voices expressed the wish for him to return soon. Visits such as these give all of us the opportunity to draw close to those who have lived a monastic life for many, many years, teaching by both words and example.

July saw two sāmaneras from our community ordain as bhikkhus. Sāmaneras Santamano and Thānavaro received full acceptance into the Bhikkhu Sangha in a ceremony led by Ajahn Amaro in his new role as upajjhāya (see article on page 28). Also on that day, Anagārika Wei-sen formally requested the sāmanera precepts, and was given the Dhamma name Narindo (‘one of supreme excellence’).

The Vassa, or Rains Retreat, in 2011 took place from 15 July to 12 October. This period of relative stability offered monks and nuns at Amaravati the opportunity for periods of silent retreat, both as a group and in solitude. Also during this period, the Amaravati tradition of Sunday afternoon Dhamma talks took place once again.

Last year’s Kathina took place on 6 November, and once again was a Royal Kathina, with the Royal Kathina Robe being graciously offered by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand through a representative from the Royal Thai Embassy. The Kathina was led jointly by three Sri Lankan groups and was also very special with the visit of Luang Por Pasanno, as mentioned above, who offered the Dhamma talk that day.

Following the Kathina, the movement of resident monks and nuns began. One of the more notable departures was that of Ajahn Vajiro, who left the community after ten years (see article on page 17). Other people on the move are Ajahn Jayanto, who began a one-year period of sabbatical. He is planning to spend time in Thailand and the US, with other destinations possible. The nuns’ community has continued taking turns utilizing the fine accommodations at Rocana Vihara and Chithurst, with small groups of their community spending periods of time there in that quiet forest setting (see articles on pages 20 and 21). A group of senior nuns travelled to Thailand this winter during the time of Ajahn Chah’s twentieth death anniversary (see photo opposite), which was also attended by Amaravati abbot Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Nāmarato. Ven. Dhammiko has left for Sri Lanka, where he plans to stay for an indefinite period of time. Ven. Santamano will be accompanying his mentor Ajahn Vajiro for a six-month planned stay in New Zealand and then in Thailand.

On 20 November an ordination ceremony was held at Amaravati. On this day Sāmanera Moneyyo of Chithurst formally requested entry into the Bhikkhu Sangha, with Ajahn Amaro acting as bhikkhu preceptor for the first time here at Amaravati. A number of Ven. Moneyyo’s family and friends travelled from Austria to attend this auspicious event.

And now we are in the depths of winter and the middle of our annual three-month Winter Retreat, which is scheduled to continue until 31 March. During this period Amaravati does not accept overnight guests. However, day visits are welcome, whether you are wishing to come to the monastery for the meal-offering or simply come and sit quietly in our peaceful surroundings.

For our communities in the West, and more specifically in the Northern Hemisphere, the Winter Retreat is in many respects more of a ‘Rains Retreat’ for us than the Vassa. With shorter days and colder, wetter weather it is a natural time of the year for the body and mind to incline inwards. The mind and heart are given the opportunity to settle and reflect with more stillness and quietude, offering a quality of openness to our inner worlds as we walk this Path towards peace.

Lastly, it has been well over a year since Luang Por Sumedho left Amaravati Monastery to begin his life of ‘retirement.’ A number of people have seen him since he departed, and reports back have all been that he is very healthy and happy, and is greatly enjoying this change in his living situation. This is news we can only take delight in, and bask in the muditā that arises.
As part of Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek’s visit to Europe in the spring of 2011, they visited Aruna Ratanagiri for a number of days, spending time with the community there. Here are just a few images of their visit.
Ajahn Vajiro, who has spent the past ten years living at Amaravati and helping to lead the community here, has recently departed on his way to new horizons. Ajahn Vajiro was one of the first people in our Sangha to encounter the teachings of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho in this country, having first met them at the Hampstead Vihara in 1977. It wasn’t long before he moved into the house next door. In 1978 he asked to join the community as an anagārika and soon afterwards left for Thailand, just after the community moved out of London to establish Cittaviveka Buddhist Monastery in June 1979. Not long after arriving in Thailand he became a sāmanera, and received upasampadā from Ajahn Chah in June of the following year.

Ajahn Vajiro returned to England in 1984 and assisted with the establishment of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, followed by periods of living at Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery and Cittaviveka. In 1993 he accepted the invitation to take up the role as abbot of Bodhinyanarama Monastery near Wellington, New Zealand, where he remained for five years. This was followed by three years of living quietly in the Sanghaloka hermitage near Melbourne, Australia.

Ajahn Vajiro then arrived at Amaravati in 2001, at the invitation of Luang Por Sumedho. Over this last decade Ajahn Vajiro has been one of the most significant contributors to the life and well-being of the monastery. He took the helm when Luang Por Sumedho was away travelling and oversaw and assisted with the myriad aspects of life at Amaravati.

In 2010 a group in Portugal formally invited Ajahn Vajiro to help establish a monastery there. This invitation arose following a few years of his involvement in the project since, while here, Luang Por Sumedho had asked Ajahn Vajiro to help the group in Portugal with setting up the legal structure to support a monastic Sangha in that country. When he began his involvement with the project he said that he was not intending to go and live there himself; however, life is full of surprises and his connection with the Portuguese Buddhist community has proved to be a very fruitful collaboration.

He has now undertaken to lead the initiative for five years. Luang Por Sumedho is supportive of the project, as is the Elders’ Council here in Europe; and both Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek also expressed their approval when they visited Amaravati this past spring. Some of the Portuguese bhikkhus, as well as other monks from our community, plan to be part of this development.

On 8 November, just two days after the Amaravati Kathina, Ajahn Vajiro departed to fulfil a commitment to visit New Zealand for six months. With other teaching engagements along the way he plans to be back in the UK by early July 2012. Afterwards, from the beginning of the Vassa of 2012, which begins on 2 August, his intention is to be based in Portugal.

The Amaravati Sangha wishes to express its gratitude for the gift of Ajahn Vajiro’s generous and energetic spirit, and for everything that he has contributed to the well-being and development of the monastery over these many years – and not just for this monastery but for the whole Buddhist community in Britain. We wish him well. ọụzọ
We began our annual Rains Retreat on 16 July with eight residents. Towards the end of May Ajahn Dhīrapañño joined the community from Thailänd, and has now received a one year work visa. Then in early July we were joined by Ven. Thitavijjo from Malaysia, who plans to reside here for 18 months.

Ajahn Jotipālo, who stayed here for seven months and bravely ‘held the fort’ while I was away in Europe and Canada, departed on 19 May for Abhayagiri Monastery in California. From being the only monk here he has joined a community of about 15 monastics in the USA.

Through the months of June and July quite a number of guests came to stay. In particular Souphong and Cameron came to try out a longer term commitment to monastic life. Thus a week before the beginning of the retreat they received the Eight Precepts of the anāgārika training. We were also joined by a Thai nun, Mae Chee Wanwesa.

With many guests and visitors we were able to complete quite a few projects before the retreat began. We wound down the work projects as the retreat began and settled into a routine of more formal practice with each resident having time for silent retreat.

This part of New Zealand was enjoying a mild winter when, all of a sudden, we were surprised by an exceptionally cold storm bringing a once-in-a-life-time snowfall. Several of us were unable to return to our huts due to the slippery snow and many trees and branches down on the tracks. Only one meal needed to be prepared in-house as a number of people braved the snowy roads to provide further meals. After several days of chain-sawing and pruning, the tracks were made passable, although the full clean-up will take quite a bit longer.

Our Robe Offering Ceremony was held on Sunday, 30 October. Ajahn Kusalo from Tisarana Monastery, Ajahn Chandako, Ajahn Nantawat and Ven. Mudito from Vimutti Monastery, Auckland attended, with Ajahn Chandako offering the Dhamma reflections in the evening.

Over the Christmas and New Year period Ajahn Sucitto, abbot of Chithurst Monastery, UK, and Ajahn Vajiro, former abbot of Bodhinyanarama, visited us for some days and joined us for the end of year ceremony.

This year we are hoping to welcome Ven. Ambalangoda Vajiravansa from Sri Lanka. Ordained in the Forest Tradition of Sri Lanka he is now practicing in the Ajahn Chah Forest Tradition in north-east Thailand.

During the month of February we expect a visit from Ajahn Viradhammo, abbot of Tisarana Monastery and the founding abbot of Bodhinyanarama. It will be his first visit in nearly nine years so I am sure many people will be eager to see him again. He has offered to give the Sunday night talks when he is here as well as lead a ten-day retreat in February.

Lastly, I have recently decided to end my tenure as abbot of Bodhinyanarama, with the plan to formally step down in March this year. As mentioned above, Ajahn Kusalo, who originally ordained here over 20 years ago, recently returned to Bodhinyanarama for a brief visit. The main reason for his visit was to re-acquaint himself with the monastery and community with a view to taking up residence, and the role of abbot, later this year.

With Metta,
Ajahn Tiradhammo
The most significant news from Hartridge is that, after several years on the drawing board, in summer 2011 we applied for and received planning permission to build a new Dhamma Hall and guest accommodation, along with improved amenities and a replacement workshop/storage building.

Since the monastery began 25 years ago the shrine room has been in the lounge of the original Odle Cottage. This room is regularly overcrowded, and the quiet atmosphere is impaired by close proximity to the kitchen, bathroom and rooms upstairs. Further, as the old cottage is built on ground at a significant gradient, there are steps throughout and wheelchair access is not possible. The new Dhamma Hall will provide for a larger and more suitable meeting space, separate from the cottage. The main structure will be a timber frame with straw bale walls, making for an ecological method of construction and maintenance, with low heating requirements. For more information on these plans you can visit <http://www.hartridgemonastery.org/index.php?pageID=13>.

Lotus Volunteer Group

January 2012 saw the launch of the Lotus Volunteer Group (LVG). Founded and managed by a group of lay supporters, the LVG aims to facilitate volunteer support to the community of monks and nuns living at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery. Willing lay friends are invited to visit the LVG website – at www.lotusvolunteergroup.org – where you will find information about opportunities to volunteer your time, energy and skills in support of the monastery. Current opportunities include helping with proofreading and driving (including trailer driving).
The Buddha often used similes from nature to illustrate basic truths of human existence. In that spirit we could liken the result of what has happened for our nuns’ community in recent years to a plant that has undergone a severe pruning. Since 2008, over half of the nuns have left, including a substantial proportion of therīs (nuns of over ten years). Some have disrobed, others have simply left the lineage to practise independently as ten-precept nuns or to pursue Bhikkhuni Ordination and training.

While such decimation could well have wiped out our Sangha altogether, the faith and determination of the remaining Sisters, together with the enormous sense of encouragement and good will – both from our monastic Brothers and from countless lay friends – seems (so far) to be enabling a sense of regeneration within our tiny community. Something to celebrate. The completion of projects initiated well before our numbers plummeted are now coming to seem less like a disastrous mistake, and more like a joyful sign of what is to come.

Of course, with just ten sīladharā and, at the time of writing, three anagārikās, careful consideration has been needed as to how to best steward our resources. Last year began with no nuns at all resident at Chithurst during the winter retreat, as it seemed important to consolidate our practice together – as one community. In the spring time this still seemed the appropriate sense to foster; we did this by having small groups of Sisters – usually just three at a time – take turns to spend time at Rocana Vihara at Chithurst. We were grateful that the bhikkhu community at Chithurst was open to us experimenting, with the nuns at Rocana being more autonomous than previously. This meant that we could designate one day a week as a ‘faith dāna’ day, when people could bring food offerings for the meal to offer to the nuns’ community at Rocana. We were grateful that the bhikkhu community at Chithurst was open to us experimenting, with the nuns at Rocana being more autonomous than previously. 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This meant that we could designate one day a week as a ‘faith dāna’ day, when people could bring food offerings for the meal to offer to the nuns’ community at Rocana. We were grateful that the bhikkhu community at Chithurst was open to us experimenting, with the nuns at Rocana being more autonomous than previous...
for sīladharā (see article below). This initiative started about five years ago, at a time when our community was relatively robust, and we had become keenly aware of how few options there were available for nuns of our tradition to practise; basically, it was just Chithurst or Amaravati – both wonderful resources in their own right, and both double communities that attract many guests and visitors. What seemed to be needed in addition was somewhere quieter where Sisters could practise together in community, or spend extended periods of time in solitary retreat.

Well, much has been said about buildings and practical work – that is what is, to most people, most obvious. However, it is the work of contemplation that is, of course, by far the most important aspect of what we do; the cultivation of a continuous and kindly awareness that notices – often in stark relief – the highs and lows, struggles and conflicts of our own minds and bodies. Our precious Sangha community both supports that contemplation and provides the material for it. Our pūjās provide respite and uplift, our meditation nourishes and enables understanding, and our sutta and Vinaya studies guide and remind us of both the tools that the Buddha provided and the possibility of perfect liberation of the heart.

Long may we all continue to grow in Dhamma.  

Sister Candasirī

Milntuim – a monastic residence for Sīladharā

After almost three years of looking, a suitable property that can serve as an additional monastic residence for the Sīladharā Sangha has been purchased in Scotland. Clearly, owing to the small number of Sisters and our already considerable commitment to the communities at Amaravati and Chithurst, it will be a very long time before the Sīladharā Sangha is able actually to consider making use of this offering. However, I intend to spend short periods of time there myself, as conditions allow – with or without accompanying sīladharā or anagārikās. Fortunately, a number of lay friends have undertaken to offer support, taking turns to be there as caretakers, until a more constant Sangha presence might be possible.

Milntuim (pronounced ‘Miln-tume’) is in Perthshire, about one and a half hour’s drive to the north of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The village of Comrie is two and a half miles (or forty-five minutes’ walk) away. The property consists of a five-bedroom house which was built in 1975. It is set in 12.65 acres of woodland on the southern hillside of Glen Artney. There is a large room on the first floor which now serves as a shrine room – already a marble Buddha rupa which was carved in Burma graces the east-facing shrine. This was donated by Myint Su and her family, and arrived two days after we took up residence – surely an auspicious sign!

The intention is for Milntuim eventually to be a place where sīladharā and anagārikās can live in community for periods of time following a monastic routine, hopefully, without some of the complexities of the larger double communities. There would also be facilities for individual sīladharā to spend up to several months in solitary retreat. In addition I would hope that it can support the practice of lay friends near and far and – as far as our monastic discipline permits – integrate with the local community.

It’s very early days, and much thought needs to be given as to what will be a suitable administrative structure. Fortunately funds are available for immediate expenses, so there is time to consult with people who have experience with Scottish charity law and to consider carefully the way forward.

Sister Candasirī
THERE ARE PHENOMENA in nature which have an almost indescribably invigorating effect on the human body and mind, like a refreshing mountain spring for example. Personally I enjoy stepping out of the monastery door on a clear autumn morning to observe the slow changes within my immediate environment. Because of the typical early morning coolness in the mountains, all the senses get woken up quickly and are very present and ready to take in the slight changes of the morning light, and the fresh smell of innocence of the new day. The almost breathless silence during the first walking meditation of the day is so all-pervasive and striking that I feel invited to listen more deeply and sense more accurately. Even before the day has fully reached its active mode there is a beneficial quietude in the air – and also within me. The silence doesn’t mean though a total absence of sounds. There are the background sounds of a constantly streaming waterfall and the repeated rattling of trains passing through the valley, but they don’t diminish the impressions of stillness and quiet listening. It is a stillness, which has always been there and is openly accessible, as soon as I become aware of it. What comes to mind is the contemporary complaint, that in our present world stillness has been lost. But can silence or stillness really be lost, can they really go anywhere? Or is it maybe more the case that we are not present to the stillness?

During early mornings it usually takes a while in our valley, which is surrounded by high towering mountains, until the new light of day spreads out fully and thus dispels a mysterious, indefinable felt sense within me, which tends to regularly recur around the time of dawn. Even on really clear days the radiation power of the sun remains for an unbearably long time behind the sharp contours of the mountain giants on the eastern side of the monastery. So the fine clouds of mist, which have arisen over the riverbed, have an extended lifespan and can even spread out along the fields and slopes, before they capitulate to the first rays of the sun. As a quiet observer I find myself sometimes wanting to speed up the whole process, especially when there is a need for a bit more bodily heat. But in nature everything takes its own time and human impatience seems totally absurd and irrational in the face of this obvious fact. However if I manage to unmask the interventions of my own mind and resist the impulse to follow them – instead staying fully present to what is – then the spectacle of nature can unfold along its own lawful patterns. For me as the silent participant there remains only the task to leave all the sense impressions and thoughts to themselves, without any grasping or warding off. A completely natural form of contemplation has then crystallized, whereby no effort is made to either manipulate or suppress any impressions in consciousness.

Being able to allow all phenomena of heart and mind to be what they are also provides an important access to formal meditation and, beyond that, provides an indispensable base for inner cultivation. If you miss that access, then any later developments are predetermined by this omission. Our general experiences of life are then continuously influenced by hopes, worries, evaluations and even condemnations. Our view is obstructed as to how the appearances of our inner life really affect us. We do not see and recognize reality based on its natural forms of manifestation, but have instead immediately covered it over with our preferences and aversions. We encounter what is on the basis of distorted perceptions, which are again determined by a strong mental bias. Most people start meditation under the instruction to focus on a certain meditation object – one’s own breath or body, visual images or a mantra – in order to eventually reach a certain state of mind. To some degree this is appropriate and suitable, especially if
you gather the mind within a specific domain in order to move on with the acquired strength and focus. But meditation directed towards an object is not an end in itself, only a means to an end.

If we are too fixated on methods of meditation – including the observation of mental objects which arise during meditation – we can easily miss the fact that all states are by their very nature conditioned, limited and unreliable. We overlook that the fascination with states only leads us more and more into dependence and neediness. How would it be for a change if we were to loosen up that grip of our attention onto the world of objects? If we could disengage from the habit of mind to lean on external objects and get completely absorbed in a contracted way by them, and instead relate to ourselves with an attitude of inner spaciousness and openness? What would happen to the normal consequences of this narrowing down – i.e. the distorted perceptions, the habitual interpretations and value judgements of our experience and the inevitable suffering they bring along?

Could we maybe, with all our attention and care, relax into a more circumspective form of awareness – similar to the observation of natural phenomena in a mountain valley – whereby the compulsive narrowing down of our attention around objects can come to an end? Is it at this point when those conditions are fully present that alertness, calm and stillness can reveal themselves? Or is there still something missing? And if there is something missing, what would it be and what qualities would it have?

Can we allow such questions to be present within us and, most of all, can we really live them and continue to ponder them, rather than assuming that we know, because we know it all theoretically? Or maybe we just rely on the vague hope that directing our attention again and again onto a certain form of meditation will somehow someday bring the desired results.

And even more fundamentally: can we admit that in reality we don’t yet really know what’s what, but still open ourselves towards each new arising moment, with all our vulnerability and insecurity in the face of the uncertainty of one’s own existence? Are we able to bear that?

And where does this lead us all, if this is not based merely on an uptight endurance but more on a patient and equanimous resting within the stillness, clarity and presence of one’s own awareness? Material things, feelings, memories, thought activity and sense impressions appear in a completely natural manner – and disappear in the same fashion, if we allow it to happen. They are merely natural phenomena, which are impermanent, unreliable and can’t be subjected to ownership.

Is there something within all this which doesn’t cease? Is there something which is truly reliable? Ajahn Chah could get rather fierce when such questions were put forward to him and bark out: ‘There isn’t anything and we don’t call it anything – that’s all there is to it. Be finished with all of it. Finish with all that searching and craving!’! On the other hand he pointed out that in order to use conventional reality skilfully one had to rely on concepts for communication. If then we have practiced so far that we don’t grasp appearances any longer and are totally convinced that everything is uncertain and unsure, then we could also say that we have arrived at our ‘original mind’. And it’s there that all grasping and manipulation come to an end, because the ‘original mind’ or the true heart does not cease. It knows that everything ceases – but ‘that which knows’ doesn’t cease. If we have gone so far in our investigation of all phenomena and experiences that we can see them in this way – as they are according to their nature – then the heart lets go of all that, which has brought us so many difficulties and problems in the past.

Ajahn Khemasiri
Obituary of
Tan Chao Khun Mongolkittitada
(Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn)

Ajahn Maha Amorn, one of the most senior disciples of Ajahn Chah, passed away on 23 November 2010, a few weeks before his 80th birthday. He was ordained as a novice during his early teens and entered into the forest monastic way of life with Ajahn Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong after extensive Pali studies in Bangkok in the late sixties – this was roughly the same time that Luang Por Sumedho came and joined Luang Por Chah as well. Following Luang Por Chah’s sickness and inability to continue conducting ordinations, Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn was asked to take up these duties. He became the preceptor to many of the Western monks in the Ajahn Chah lineage, who would regularly go to visit and pay respects to him, always receiving heartfelt advice on many levels of Buddhist practice. This advice was often embellished with both traditional stories and similes as well as references from Ajahn Maha Amorn’s time spent living with Ajahn Chah and the older generation of monks. The following obituary was written by Luang Por Sumedho.

On the occasion of the Royal Cremation of Phra Mongolkittitada, I take this opportunity to write a few words of gratitude and appreciation to the memory of this venerable monk who has played a significant part in my own life as a bhikkhu.

During the first years of my life at Wat Nong Pah Pong, Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn became my mentor and friend. This was a most difficult time for me when I was trying to learn the Thai and Issan languages, assume the training in Vinaya, and make all the necessary adjustments to the Thai Forest tradition.

After my second Vassa, Luang Por Chah invited both Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn and myself to accompany him on a prolonged journey to pay respects to many of the Thai Forest Masters that were disciples of the late Tan Ajahn Mun. This was in the year of 1968–1969 and someone had given Luang Por Chah a Philips tape recorder. It was his intention to tape some of the teachings of these venerable masters. I remember visiting Tan Ajahn Fun in Sakolnakorn – Luang Por Chah and Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn experimenting with the tape recorder which was very new to all of us and the pleasure we felt at being able to record Dhamma teachings. During that time, we went to Wat Pah Ban Tard to pay respects to Tan Ajahn Maha Boowa and to Wat Tam Klong Pen to pay respects to Luang Pu Kow. During this time I was quite unable to understand the desanas (Dhamma talks). My Thai-Lao vocabulary was very rudimentary and limited to only a few words. However, I felt greatly honoured and privileged to be with such great beings whose very presence inspired me. Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn would do his best to explain what was being said and recorded.

After my third Vassa at Wat Nong Pah Pong, I was invited to accompany Luang Por Chah and Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn to visit a forest near the town of Ampher Muang Samsib. The townspeople from that area were offering a woodland of considerable size to Luang Por Chah, with the accompanying invitation to Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn to come and develop it into a branch monastery of Wat Nong Pah Pong.

I remember the three of us sitting on grass mats in the very spot where now resides the Grand Buddha Rupa and the simulacrum of the Phra Tad Panom. We chanted
Parittas and Luang Por Chah gave a sermon and encouragement for this endeavour. Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn gave the new monastery the name Wat Pah Vivek Dhammachah. I have always remembered this name with the wordplay from Thai to English as The Refuge of the Dhamma of Luang Por Chah.

Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn had a very good sense of history both of the Theravada tradition in general, with its Jataka stories and legends, and the history of Wat Nong Pah Pong and its branches. After building the Uposatha Hall he had an artist paint a mural in the hall, commemorating the initial event of our chanting Parittas and blessing this monastery. Still today one can see the portraits of Luang Por Chah, Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn and myself painted as murals on the walls opposite the main shrine.

In 1975–1976, when I was busy establishing Wat Pah Nanachat, taking on the duties of the abbot, Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn was a constant source of encouragement for me. Also, when I went to live in England, he was always interested and eager to know about how I was doing in the West. I had invited him many times to come to England but due to his declining health he always refused.

When Luang Por Chah was no longer able to perform the ordination ceremonies, Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn took on the duties of upajjhāya and gave the pabbajjā and upasampadā to many foreigners at Wat Pah Nanachat. Therefore during the many years that I lived in England, Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn supported and encouraged Luang Por Pasanno and Ajahn Jayasāro by ordaining the many foreigners who sought after the life and training within the Thai Forest tradition at Wat Pah Nanachat. Later on, Tan Ajahn Liem assumed the duties of upajjhāya.

I have, for many years, felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for being able to live the life of a bhikkhu and to have the good fortune to meet and live near one of the greatest Buddhist monks of our time, i.e. Luang Por Chah.

Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn also felt this way. We could share our appreciation and gratitude for the simple and profound teachings of Luang Por Chah and try to emulate his example. As we get older, we have to witness the loss of these wise beings, which has its own pathos. But we also have these marvellous memories of these beings which have enhanced our lives and have always inspired and encouraged us to go in the right direction and not look back. I hold to this as my inheritance from Tan Ajahn Maha Amorn.

The last syllable of the word ‘Dhammachah’ is actually from the word-root ‘nya’ as in ‘nyana’ meaning knowledge. ‘Chah’ in this respects is an incomplete version of its verbal form, ‘j -an-ati’ meaning ‘to know’. The word ‘Dhammachah’ therefore literally translates as ‘knowledge of Dhamma’.

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

**Please note:** Many of the 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
- **anagārika:** Male or female postulant in the preliminary novitiate stage
- **ānāpānasati:** A meditation practice in which one maintains one’s attention and mindfulness on the sensations of breathing
- **avijjā:** Unawareness, ignorance; the root cause of suffering
- **bhikkhu:** A Buddhist monk
- **Buddha:** Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma
- **chedi (Thai):** Buddhist funerary mound; stupa or pagoda
- **Dhamma:** The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha
- **dhammas:** Phenomenon in and of itself, mental quality
- **dukkha:** Suffering, discontent, distress, stress
- **khandhas:** Heap; group; aggregate. Physical and mental components of the personality and of sensory experience in general
- **sīladharā:** A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho
- **sugatā:** Well-faring; going (or gone) to a good destination. An epithet for the Buddha
- **Tan (Thai):** A common title of respect
- **upāsīka:** A male/female lay follower of the Buddha
- **vihāra:** A monastic dwelling
- **Vinaya:** The monastic discipline
- **viveka:** Separation, aloofness, seclusion (either mental or physical)

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Luang Por (Thai): A title of affectionate respect (lit. ‘Venerable Father’)  
mettā: Loving-kindness  
pūjā: Devotional observances such as chanting and offering incense  
samana: Religious seeker or wanderer  
sankhāra: Can refer to anything formed or fashioned by conditions, or, more specifically, (as one of the five khandhas) thought-formations within the mind  
siladhāra: A Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho  
sugatā: Well-faring; going (or gone) to a good destination. An epithet for the Buddha  
Tan (Thai): A common title of respect  
upāsīka: A male/female lay follower of the Buddha  
vihāra: A monastic dwelling  
Vinaya: The monastic discipline  
viveka: Separation, aloofness, seclusion (either mental or physical)
Abandoning the unwholesome, cultivating the wholesome

The following Dhamma reflection is the summary of a talk offered by Luang Por Anek at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery on Sunday, 5 June 2011, using the oral translation by Ajahn Kevali that followed Luang Por Anek’s talk given in the Thai language.

I would like to offer some reflections on aspects of the Dhamma by speaking about the life of an important disciple of the Buddha, one who is surely known to all of us, and that is the Venerable Sāriputta Thera. He is someone who abandoned those things that should be abandoned, cultivated those things that should be cultivated, understood what should be understood and walked the path to true knowledge.

Those of us who have visited India, the land where the Buddha was born, lived and taught, may have stopped over at Nālandā, the site of a big university, the first ever in history. On this site we can find the place where Venerable Sāriputta was born. Later generations who gave importance to Venerable Sāriputta venerated him by building a chedi there at his birthplace – quite a high building. This is a marker that has been set up for worshipping and paying homage to the profound quality of wisdom that Sāriputta developed in his life.

On one occasion the Venerable Sāriputta went to pay respects to the Buddha. On that occasion he met Venerable Anuruddha, who was a relative of the Buddha. These two venerable ones, Sāriputta and Anuruddha, had never met. They had only heard of each other. When they met they started a conversation about the teachings and the practices that had helped them see the Dhamma and realize liberation, and they talked about how to practise accordingly.

Venerable Anuruddha asked Sāriputta; ‘Dear Venerable Sāriputta, in terms of practice how did it start, how did it develop, that you have attained to the highest truths, to realizing freedom from suffering? Let us hear about this so we can benefit and take it as an example for our practice.’

Venerable Sāriputta answered, ‘Venerable Anuruddha, the practices that I did were similar to making myself like somebody who lights a fire, attends to a fire and who looks after a fire; one who sets out firewood and ignites it, and then the fire illuminates the darkness. And then sitting close to the fire I could see things very closely. I could see the things that were useful for the fire and burnable, and could be added as fuel. I then gathered them and put them into the fire and helped make it grow. I also saw things close by which were not so supportive of the fire, and I also threw these in and still it blazed up even more. So I used my sati and my sampajañña, my mindfulness and clear comprehension – my wisdom.

‘After having lit the fire, tended the fire, and used it to see supportive things growing and unsupportive things being destroyed, I looked at those things with all my mindfulness and wisdom. I cultivated the wholesome, and I eradicated the unwholesome, as if I was throwing them into the fire. Even a fire sustained by unwholesome things gets brighter and brighter, and I could see more clearly.

‘Seeing things that are to be developed and seeing things that are detrimental, I was constantly able to develop those things that are worthy of development and to eradicate those things that are detrimental, whether by body or speech, or, eventually by mind. Developing and collecting wholesome things I noticed there were more and more wholesome things to be observed. Getting up from lying down, sitting, walking and standing still, I observed the increase of wholesome dhammas (qualities) in all the postures.

‘Entering this process of seeing the Dhamma more and more, the good qualities increased and eventually the lokiya-dhammas, the worldly dhammas, turned into the lokuttara-dhammas, the dhammas that are beyond the world. It’s like paññā, the light of wisdom, burning up all the unwholesome things. Eventually I arrived at complete purity through the use of wisdom. As the day passed, the wholesome dhammas kept growing until there was no more increase possible.’

If we sit, stand, walk and lie down with mindfulness and wisdom as a constant practice, and take it up naturally as a model to practise like Sāriputta in order to cultivate and
derive benefits and abandon those things that are detrimental, we too should be able to receive some reward from our practice.

Now all of us have come here to sit down and meditate. Our sitting here can be compared to igniting the fire. We’re sitting down in mindfulness and using paññā, which is the light that shines on our inner life, and we use discernment to see and take things inward – the opanayika-dhamma. We close our eyes but we are opening them up to look inside so that we can know the obstacles that arise in the heart, and see the hindrances, the nīvarana (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and drowsiness, restlessness and anxiety, and uncertainty). For example when we observe irritating experiences, whether they are on the level of painful feelings that arise physically, or anything else we experience internally, we take the example of Venerable Sāriputta, who saw those as unwholesome obstacles to developing purity and peace of mind. He felt he needed to relieve himself of those obstacles, extract them from the heart and abandon them; to not hold on to things but abandon and let go of them so they wouldn’t become powerful and obstruct his peace of mind. It requires determination to use one’s wisdom in order to burn up those things that are not useful, not believing them and falling under their sway.

Sitting we practise using paññā as a light and keep purifying our mind. Whether we sit down for a long time or a short time it doesn’t matter. But it is important to observe and see how the hindrances obstruct the mind, and then abandon them, as they are truly obstructions that hinder progress. We check and look at them from all angles, try to see their danger and understand how our mind gets weakened by them. We are not willing to give way to them or get up before we have let them go. We keep practising the abandoning of the unwholesome and the cultivating of the wholesome continually. Whatever arises that stains our hearts we need to abandon with mindfulness and wisdom, maintaining awareness in a steadfast way.

Seeing the obstacles caused by agitation and worry, but not supporting or feeding them, our minds become less and less irritated and more and more empty and peaceful. We become more and more free. This emptiness becomes clearer and more complete, as mindfulness remains fully awake, watching to take every opportunity to abandon the agitations obstructing it. We support, cultivate and increase this emptiness, taking our minds to an empty, cool space where there’s peace and freedom from those agitating things that make the world spin round and round, and that are obstacles to freedom. On this path between the world and the Dhamma, between restlessness and peace, we gradually start seeing and knowing more clearly, lighting a fire to illuminate things, enlightening them. Whatever happens, whatever arises, we throw it into this blazing fire and burn it up, until there is nothing left, seeing it with wisdom. This direct path to peace is entirely the work of wisdom.

Inclining towards this peace we increase it and give it support and importance, like Sāriputta when he was tending the fire. But we don’t pay attention or give importance to insignificant, interruptive or irritating things; things that stir up anger, that arouse us, that make us feel agitated. We don’t lose ourselves in things that are clearly unwholesome. Getting lost in unwholesome things is like walking into a dark, deep wood without a clear and even path, the wood of avijjā (ignorance), the wood of our cravings and desires where we get lost. But by using paññā to guide us, the path brightens up and we can gradually see the way.

Practising on this path, whether it’s at home or wherever, we have the means to develop ourselves by using our minds through our determination to abandon the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome. Wherever we are, we’re able to know this path of peace. It doesn’t depend on the place, but on our determination. We can use it wherever we’re situated, for example where we are right now, it is always valuable and meaningful. Whenever we cast away the unwholesome, the wholesome takes its place immediately, at any time in any place.

I would like to offer these teachings in line with Sāriputta, who suggested this method to prosper in practice through seeing the wholesome and creating merit – puñña – connecting them together until they become more and more fulfilling. Being equipped with our human body and mind we must all surely possess substantial foundations in wholesome things. We must have done meritorious actions before that now enable us to see this path and meet these teachings and practices for the development of peace. We can be sure of this, and as we are humans, or children of the Buddha, we’re able to use this opportunity to cultivate our practice and put out the fires. We are able to cast away the obstructing characteristics and pull out the defilements.

Having received some of the teachings that we need for practice, we are capable of moving forward and developing ourselves. And there are many occasions for practice. Whether it is day or night, whenever we have mindfulness towards our body and speech, we’re able to practise to increase the wholesome and abandon the unwholesome; to reflect on and cultivate good qualities and gather those things that are worthy of gathering. We then connect and develop them through using our wisdom. That will lead to the samana-dhamma – the quality of the peaceful ones. This samana-dhamma is not in the text books. It’s something that is written in the heart. This can be exemplified in the way we use skilful means to abstain from evil paths and cultivate good ones, by drawing on the power of our sīla (virtuous conduct), for example.

So may all of us offer our bodies and lives to this practice in the framework of the Dhamma, and have confidence in the possibility of arriving at the completion of this practice. It is possible to do this. The Three Jewels (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) are not just external qualities that we

Dhamma means peace and the pure nature of our heart …

(Continued on page 29)
On Sunday, 10 July 2011, a large gathering of Sangha members associated with the Ajahn Chah lineage here in Britain came together at Cittaviveka Monastery for a bhikkhu ordination ceremony (upasampadā), as well as a pabbajjā or novice going-forth. This was the first upasampadā to be held at Cittaviveka in four years.

In some respects, within our tradition of monasticism here in the West, this was in itself not an out-of-the-ordinary event. Nearly every year, ordination ceremonies have taken place either at Cittaviveka, Aruna Ratanagiri or Amaravati monasteries, and in some years there have been more than one such event. However, last year was special as it was the first time that bhikkhu ordinations have been held here since Luang Por Sumedho retired. It also marked the first time that Ajahn Amaro, newly appointed abbot of Amaravati, acted as upajjhāya, or preceptor, for a bhikkhu ordination.

To have the authority to act as an upajjhāya in the Thai tradition of Buddhism is not a common occurrence at all. Luang Por Sumedho was the first elder in our Western Sangha to receive such status, with only a very few others receiving it since then. With Luang Por’s retirement last year, the need to have someone here in Britain and Europe able to carry out ordinations became clear, and Luang Por himself initiated the proceedings that would enable the appointments as preceptors to take place.

The elders of our Western Bhikkhu Sangha decided that two candidates would be put forward as upajjhāyas: Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapālo, abbot of Santacittarama Monastery in Italy. Official paperwork was submitted and these two venerable abbots were introduced to the Council of Elders in Thailand, who govern the appointment of upajjhāyas, during a visit there in January 2011. The initial response from the Thai elders indicated that these appointments would go through as requested, and everything seemed to be proceeding as expected. However, time was passing and no word or correspondence was received confirming these appointments, and the date of the scheduled ordination ceremony on 10 July was drawing near.

While Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek were staying at Amaravati in May and June, they heard about the upcoming ordinations planned for July, and the fact that there was, as yet, no upajjhāya to perform the ceremonies. As an immense act of generosity and support Luang Por Liem and Luang Por Anek took it upon themselves to do what they could to see that the appointments as upajjhāyas went through, and immediately after their return to Thailand they went to visit the ecclesiastical elders in Bangkok to check on the status of the applications.

Very soon afterwards word came through that Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapālo would be appointed as preceptors, and in time for the 10 July ceremonies. Luang Por Liem even took it upon himself to fly from Ubon to Bangkok to collect the certificates. Luang Por Liem indicated that, as he had collected the certificates from Bangkok, it would be appropriate for Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapālo to go to Thailand to collect the certificates from Wat Nong Pah Pong. So, during the first week of July, Ajahn Amaro made a very short visit to Thailand (Ajahn Chandapālo was unable to do so at that time). Luang Por Liem and the Wat Nong Pah Pong Sangha also organized a ceremony for the presentation of the certificates to Ajahn Amaro, who received Ajahn Chandapālo’s on his behalf.

Ajahn Amaro returned to the UK just three days before the scheduled ceremony. It was only then that everyone could say that the ordinations could definitely go ahead as planned. The five candidates for upasampadā, as well as the candidate for novice pabbajjā, quite possibly let out a collective sigh of relief!
Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapālo... (Continued from page 28)

So back to Sunday, 10 July. The weather was threatening rain that day, with more cloud than sun during the morning. But after the meal-offering, as the ceremonies began, the clouds gave way to bright skies, and a large gathering of people witnessed the ancient ceremonies of six men deepening their commitment to the Holy Life.

Before the ordinations began, the Sangha gathered together in the simā (the physical boundary within which ordinations must take place) for a short ceremony recognizing Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapālo’s new status as upajjhāyas (see photo this page). Having elders in our communities with the authority to act as upajjhāyas is highly significant, and this gracious yet powerful ceremony reflected this.

This ceremony was immediately followed by the ordinations themselves, with Ajahn Amaro officiating as preceptor. Sāmaneras Santamano and Thānavaro of Amaravati, Ven. Anālayo and Sāmanera Thāniyo of Cittaviveka, and Sāmanera Bodhinando of Aruna Ratanagiri were formally admitted into the Bhikkhu Sangha.

Also on this day Anagārika Wei-sen of Amaravati requested sāmanera pabbajjā (novice ordination), so he donned the ochre robe for the first time and, on this occa-

Abandoning the unwholesome... (Continued from page 27)

take refuge in. Keeping the principles of the Teacher, the Teachings and those who have walked this way of life, we gradually practise developing our mind and cultivating which ordinations must take place) for a short ceremony recognizing Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Chandapālo’s new status as upajjhāyas (see photo this page). Having elders in our communities with the authority to act as upajjhāyas is highly significant, and this gracious yet powerful ceremony reflected this.

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Ajahn Chandapālo receives his upajjhāya certificate from Ajahn Amaro sion, received the new name Sāmanera Narindo.

Apart from the fact that there were now five more bhikkhus in the world, as well as another sāmanera, this day exhibited the power and beauty of a tradition as established by the Buddha. Appointing new upajjhāyas ensures that, at least for the foreseeable future, more monks and nuns can live the Holy Life and tread the path that leads to full liberation of the heart. All of us who see the value of this way of life as a vehicle towards peace greatly appreciate having elders in our Sangha who are willing to shoulder responsibilities of such a weighty nature as being an upajjhāya.

I will conclude by saying that I would like to be your friend and relative in this practice – in the Dhamma – and wish for all of us to endeavour to guard our sīla and our practice, and maintain wisdom; to cultivate the wholesome and abandon the unwholesome. All of us, the monks, nuns and laypeople, are like the children of Lady Visākha, keeping the virtues of the Triple Gem and developing benefits. And whether we go back to Wat Nong Pah Pong where Luang Por Liem has come from, or Wat Pah Nanachat, or my own monastery Wat Pah Sai Ngam, or whether we just meet here now, be sure to know you have my best wishes. We should think of each other as practitioners, as sāvakas – as hearers of the Dhamma. When we reflect on great disciples like Sāriputta, may it inspire and shine the light on all of those who are willing to see good and evil, merit and demerit, in order to know the path of practice. May all of us be able to see these things and practise in a correct and complete way. Then the Buddha will guarantee our progress through his path of sīla, samādhi, paññā, all the way to peace and happiness for each and every one of us. May all of us arrive at the completion of all our wholesome aspirations. May these aspirations never cease to guide us all to magga-phāla-nibbāna – the fruits of the path to liberation.
The following retreats and events are held at the Retreat Centre at Amaravati. Please note that the Retreat Centre managers deal only with bookings for Monastic Retreats. For contact details of other organizing groups, please refer to the right-hand column.

**Monastic Retreats (led by a monk or a nun)**

For bookings and information please visit www.amaravati.org (Retreat Centre), email retreats at amaravati dot org or ring (01442) 843239.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>20–22 April</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Bodhipālā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>11–20 May</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Ariyasīlo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>25–29 May</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Mettā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>8–10 June</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Teacher TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>15–19 June</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Kalyāno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>29 June–1 July</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Jointly led by monastic and lay teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>2 July–8 July</td>
<td>7 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Amaro and Joseph Kappel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>20–29 July</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Viradhammo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>3–7 Aug.</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Sukhacitto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R10</td>
<td>31 Aug.–12 Sept.</td>
<td>13 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Amaro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11</td>
<td>21–25 Sept.</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Gandhasīlo</td>
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<tr>
<td>R12</td>
<td>5–7 Oct.</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Dhammanando</td>
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<tr>
<td>R13</td>
<td>12–21 Oct.</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Sundarā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R14</td>
<td>2–4 Nov.</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Candasi &amp; Brother Nicholas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R15</td>
<td>16–20 Nov.</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Nānarato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R16</td>
<td>30 Nov.–9 Dec.</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Sucitto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R17</td>
<td>27 Dec.–1 Jan.</td>
<td>6 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Vajiro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Fully booked – waiting list in operation.
- Participation is restricted to those who have previously attended a 10-day retreat.
- Full for women, places available for men.
- Full for men, places available for women.

**Booking Guidelines**

All weekend retreats are suitable for people 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. Bookings are only accepted on receipt of a completed booking form which can be downloaded from the website, or requested from the Retreat Centre. Please send your booking form by post. Only in exceptional circumstances will we accept booking forms sent by email. No booking fee is required. Donations are welcomed at the end of retreats. Registration is from 4.00-7.00 p.m. on the first day of the retreat. Weekend retreats end at 5.00 p.m., longer retreats end after lunch.

**AMARAVATI RETREAT CENTRE**

**Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA)**

Retreats and Days of Practice (led by an experienced layperson). For bookings and information please visit www.buddhacommunity.org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3 March</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 March</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27–29 April</td>
<td>Weekend Retreat</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 June</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10–14 Aug.</td>
<td>5-day Retreat</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15 Sept.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28–30 Sept.</td>
<td>Weekend Retreat</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 Dec.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Buddhist Women’s Network (BWN)**

Retreats and Days of Practice (led by an experienced laywoman). For bookings and information please contact Shirley McDonald at shirleymcdonald at hotmail dot co dot uk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4 March</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13–15 July</td>
<td>Weekend Retreat</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 Sept.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 Dec.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Family Events**

For bookings and information please visit www.family.amaravati.org or contact familyevents at amaravati dot org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4–7 May</td>
<td>Rainbows Weekend</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22–24 June</td>
<td>Family Camp Weekend</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18–26 Aug.</td>
<td>Family Camp</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26–28 Oct.</td>
<td>Creative Weekend (Age 18+)</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>9–11 Nov.</td>
<td>Young Persons’ Weekend</td>
<td>Shirley McDonald</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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 following page) or check via the Retreat Centre website at www.amaravati.org.
Now that the Forest Sangha Newsletter is published 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 the monasteries.

Announcements can be found on the back page. The postal address and contact details for each monastery can be found on the Grapevine. Where to find news and announcements can be found on the Current News webpage. Updated news and announcements can be found on Abhayagiri’s website, where you can also read or download their newsletter, A Coruña, Spain

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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>Anne Armitage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Banbury</td>
<td>Sarah Wallis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basingstoke</td>
<td>Alan Marshall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bedford</td>
<td>David Snibbs</td>
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<td>Berkshire</td>
<td>Anthea West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brentwood</td>
<td>Richard Burch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brighton – Bodhi Garden (<a href="http://www.bodhigarden.org">www.bodhigarden.org</a>):</td>
<td>David Glendining</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>Lisa Daix</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Meg Clarke</td>
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<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>Charles Watters</td>
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<td>Carlisle</td>
<td>Jean Nelson</td>
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<td>Chichester</td>
<td>Tony Halter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cookham, Maidenhead</td>
<td>Emily Tomalin or David Lillywhite</td>
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<td>Hemel Hempstead – Bodhinyana Group:</td>
<td>Chris Ward</td>
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<td>Kendal – Buddhist Group of Kendal (bgkt etherway dot net):</td>
<td>Sumertha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leeds Area</td>
<td>Daniela Loeb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Anna Grimschw</td>
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<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>Ursula Haeckel</td>
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<td>London Buddhist Society,</td>
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<td>58 Eccleston Square, London SW1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>London Hampstead</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ann Booth</td>
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<td>London West</td>
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<td>Maidstone – Alokabodhi Buddhist Group:</td>
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<td>Newcastle</td>
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<td>Newent-Gloucestershire</td>
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<td>Totnes</td>
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<td>Outside England</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co. Clare, Ireland: Sunyata Centre (+353) 61 367 073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cork, Ireland: Paddy Boyle (+353) 21 462 2964</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A Coruña, Spain</td>
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