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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 2013

Retreats at Aruna Ratanagiri are held at Kusala House, a lay facility located next door to the monastery buildings and are open to both men and women. Meditation instruction is provided by the senior monk leading the retreat, with periods of sitting and walking meditation. A Dhamma talk usually follows the evening sitting.

As there is limited space on the retreats the monastery adopts the policy of a maximum of two retreats per person in any one year.

Mixed Retreat 12–16 April
Led by Ajahn Nyānarato

Mixed Retreat 4–10 August
Led by Ajahn Abhinando

Mixed Retreat 6–8 September
Led by Ajahn Kāruniko

For more information or to book a place on any of these events, please contact Kath Jones on 0120 7283 361 (mobile: 0770 7621 717) or email: retreats at ratanagiri dot org dot uk.

Kusala House, Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery, Harnham, Belsay, Northumberland, UK
www.ratanagiri.org.uk/retreats/

KATHINA 2013

This year the Kathina season commences on 20 October, and continues until 17 November. Kathina celebrations and robe offering ceremonies scheduled to be held in the following monasteries:

AMARAVATI (HERTFORDSHIRE)
Kathina: 10 November

CITTAVIVEKA (WEST SUSSEX)
Kathina: 20 October

HARNHAM (NORTHUMBERLAND)
Kathina: 3 November

HARTRIDGE (DEVON)
Robe Offering Ceremony: 27 October

ABHAYAGIRI (USA)
Kathina: 20 October

BODHINYANARAMA (NEW ZEALAND)
Kathina: TBA

DHAMMAPALA (SWITZERLAND)
Kathina: 3 November

SANTACITTARAMA (ITALY)
Kathina: 27 October

Anumodana

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Self-sacrifice: A Way to Inner Silence

This article was adapted from a Dhamma reflection offered by Ajahn Viradhammo at Chithurst Monastery on 14 July 2012. He is the founder and abbot of Tisarana Monastery near Perth, Ontario (Canada) and was the founding abbot of Bodhinyanarama Monastery (NZ). From 1995 to 1999 he assisted Luang Por Sumedho at Amaravati Monastery. This was his first visit to Chithurst since 2004.

One thing that comes up a lot for me is the limitation of personality. There’s something about it which doesn’t really change that much. The extrovert remains the extrovert, the introvert remains the introvert: our personalities seem to be hardwired. And yet we’re all working to liberate the heart from suffering – we want to find that spacious, peaceful place – but I don’t think it can be found in the personality. I don’t know about you, but I’ve given up on that. I suggest that if you think you’re going to liberate the heart by getting the perfect personality, that’s a losing game. This doesn’t mean that we can’t try to become more considerate people, or that we can’t do things to be different in some external way, but the emphasis has to be on finding the place that is not personality, the place of stillness and silence which can know the arising and ceasing of personality. That’s a different project. It’s not the project of self-development, of becoming, getting rid of, judging; it’s the project of simply taking the time to know the way things are. And that’s not as easy as it sounds.

As many of you know, I took care of my mother for nine years, until she died about a year and a half ago. During that time I lived in her condominium – which was a bit of a workout for a monk. I’m not used to living in condominiums. It was however a very beautiful thing to do. As I say to people: the two best things I’ve done with my life are becoming a monk and taking care of my mom. My mother and I had an extraordinarily warm, friendly, loving relationship, and in nine years we had only one disagreement, which lasted about fifteen minutes. So it was pretty special; not everyone has that kind of opportunity.

I think one of the things that is probably more difficult to develop in monasticism than in lay life is a sense of self-sacrifice from the heart. When I was with my mom and loving her, being really attentive to her needs from a space in the heart that was very natural and caring, self-sacrifice came quite easily. I think that if laypeople choose to create a family or live with a partner, and do it well in a loving way, self-sacrifice comes easily. Monastic life can sometimes be challenging because it’s not based on these deep, close relationships that we have as family. Instead, it’s based on respect and sometimes it’s not so easy to manifest the heart side of our practice as monastics. If the heart doesn’t open profoundly, monastic life can become a really dry affair, constantly self-referenced as ‘my practice, my practice, my practice’, which often doesn’t work well.

You don’t hear much about self-sacrifice in the West. I think you hear more about it in Thailand. When they talk about dāna there, they talk about sia sala, which is giving up, or self-sacrifice. I noticed that I could do a lot for my mom, and it wasn’t from feeling that I had to do it out of a sense of duty, which is a very tiring way to function. With a true sense of empathy for someone’s illness, age or whatever, one can put forth tremendous effort. Acting from a sense of duty is very different: ‘I have to do this. I have a sense of duty!’

I think one of the ways we can learn to come to that sense of self-sacrifice is through meditation, oddly enough. Meditation is a very personal affair; just sitting there on your cushion, quietly watching your mind or your breath. But in meditation there is this opportunity to no longer be a person wilfully trying to do something, become something, figure something out or get somewhere – that whole sense of self-referencing. I found questioning that, making an enquiry around effort and will very helpful. Not questioning intellectually, but viscerally, intuitively, as an observer. That’s an extraordinarily subtle attitude to bring forth into life. So much of life is something that calls for our attention. We have to attend to things, organize,
In the meditative posture, when we sit quietly, there needn’t be a sense of becoming, though often there is, but there can be a sense of spacious witnessing. That’s a huge lesson in understanding the space of the heart, which is peaceful.

I think one of the dangers of Buddhism is that it’s such a clever teaching and so beautifully laid out. Its intellectual structures are second to none, they are all very elegant and fit together nicely. It’s perhaps easy to remain with Buddhism on an intellectual level. I think we all contemplate the difference between doctrine as something that awakens, and doctrine that you feel guilty if you don’t live by right speech.

An awakening quality – rather than a moral imperative whereby you believe in it, you might feel guilt or feel some other painful emotion. This is using language to awaken, using the Buddha’s teachings to train to be objective with the unpleasant, with dukkha-vedanā. It sounds rather like a form of self-mortification or torture: ‘I’m training in dukkha-vedanā’, but in the arising of unpleasantness you can really begin to see objectively, ‘this is changing’ or ‘this hurts; this feels this way’. That little bit of training in a session of sitting practice might only be five minutes and then you move, or it might be thirty minutes and then you move. This brings a kind of strength and power into the mind when you need to be with an unpleasantness that is more emotionally powerful. You’ve intuitively understood how to be with the unpleasant and that’s not intellectual, it’s more like a craft. If you do weaving or carpentry, you learn about the grain of the wood or the elasticity of the yarn, and as you work, your hands begin to know what the yarn is like and how to weave it. Similarly, in meditation you learn things which aren’t visceral. If you do weaving or carpentry, you learn about the grain of the wood or the elasticity of the yarn, and as you work, your hands begin to know what the yarn is like and how to weave it.

The emphasis has to be on finding the place that is not personality, the place of stillness and silence which can know the arising and ceasing of personality. This is the way to use a beautiful teaching, but taking essential features from the teachings and using them profoundly means constant effort. When I feel in a negative mood but I can say ‘not me, not mine,’ there’s effort, but it’s not a wilful attempt to be something else, it’s an opening to what is. Then one senses that there is a silence in consciousness that is not the personality, that is not this particular human formation and that isn’t self-referencing. It is just the way it is.

Something we have a chance to do in sitting meditation is to develop skills which manifest in ordinary life; one of those skills is the capacity to be awake and present to the unpleasant. For example, maybe you’re used to sitting in meditation for thirty minutes at home, but you sit for forty-five minutes here. After around twenty-five minutes you may get restless, your bottom may start to hurt, or maybe you experience unpleasant sensations. Perhaps then you start to look at the shrine, at the other meditators, at your watch – that’s a disaster! – and you get fidgety because it’s unpleasant.

In sitting meditation you can begin to train to be objective with the unpleasant, with dukkha-vedanā. It sounds rather like a form of self-mortification or torture: ‘I’m training in dukkha-vedanā’, but in the arising of unpleasantness you can really begin to see objectively, ‘this is changing’ or ‘this hurts; this feels this way’. That little bit of training in a session of sitting practice might only be five minutes and then you move, or it might be thirty minutes and then you move. This brings a kind of strength and power into the mind when you need to be with an unpleasantness that is more emotionally powerful. You’ve intuitively understood how to be with the unpleasant and that’s not intellectual, it’s more like a craft. If you do weaving or carpentry, you learn about the grain of the wood or the elasticity of the yarn, and as you work, your hands begin to know what the yarn is like and how to weave it, or how to plane a piece of wood. It’s in your body; it’s visceral. Similarly, in meditation you learn things which aren’t just opinions about meditation. Through your struggles, you learn how to meditate. Your whole body begins to understand what it means not to grasp, to be at peace with the unpleasant in just little ways. That is a powerful force when the unpleasant really comes at you, in a committee meeting or maybe a family squabble, or when sickness comes. Then you’ve got some kind of equipment, some kind of understanding: ‘unpleasantness feels this way’. This is powerful and very helpful. The real depth of practice comes in ways that are perhaps hidden to you, in the little events of unpleasantness in a session of sitting meditation, or the capacity to bear witness to something to which you might want to react. Over time that builds a lovely strength of mind.

It might seem quite trivial just to be patient with your third vertebra, or with a mind that keeps muttering on, but over time that can actually be the source of a more profound freedom. If you’ve trained in qualities of wakefulness which are not wilful shop, deal with problems, etc. In the meditative posture, when we sit quietly, there needn’t be a sense of becoming, though often there is, but there can be a sense of spacious witnessing. That’s a huge lesson in understanding the space of the heart, which is peaceful.

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and don’t have a constant agenda – becoming, getting rid of and all the rest of it, (which is bound in time) – and if you have a kind of consciousness which can become more and more timeless, present and empathetic, you begin to find something in yourself which gives you deep faith and trust. You can’t really trust your emotions or your personality. I always find my emotions very disappointing, but the witnessing of emotions, the listening – that I can trust because it’s something which allows life to present itself as it has to present itself.

Listening is an interesting attitude. Just stopping and listening – there’s something very profound about that. It takes effort to listen, but it’s not wilful in the sense that I’m trying to do something, to become something. I think listening is a form of empathy. You’re allowing the experience of sound to come into you, and then understanding it, not intellectually, not as an idea, but as a felt experience. Apply that into you, and then understanding it, not intellectually, not as an idea, but as a felt experience. Apply that to something else, but just allow it to be … listening is the way of allowing self-reference it, not blame myself or project it on to someone else, but just allow it to be … listening is the way of allowing it to be, and in the listening we begin to see with awareness, see the stillness of being. It’s a silence and space that can even allow feelings of vulnerability, pain, loss; all those more deeply difficult things that we experience as human beings.

We are constructed to be wired in to a kind of magnetic force called the unpleasant and the pleasant. If you observe consciousness, there’s a pull towards beautiful things. Something grabs your attention. You’re drawn to it because it’s beautiful or it looks delicious, and that’s just the way you are wired. Comforts, beauty, warmth, these kinds of things are attractive. Then the other way: something repulsive, negative, ugly repels us. We don’t want it. It’s like a magnetic force that exists in consciousness. Our senses are constructed that way; they have to be constructed that way. We need pain in order to move deeply out of pain. We need to like food or we’d never bother with nutrition. So that magnetism is very natural, but the trouble is that it’s an endless push-pull-push-pull. It’s endless and it’s not peaceful.

Seeing the magnetic forces that exist around the unpleasant is a deeper level of understanding of consciousness. Let’s say that superficially I feel intimidated by someone; that’s the storyline. Behind this, there are thoughts and bodily feelings; maybe my guts are tight or my heart is closed. Then even deeper than that, there is just a sense of ‘pleasant’. This is where the grasping takes place: ‘This is unpleasant, I want the pleasant.’ To allow consciousness to rest with the unpleasant, and not get caught with the craving that comes from that, is a profound exercise. Quite often you remain very much at the level of personal history, self-referencing all the time, but you can go more deeply into consciousness rather than just remaining with superficial thoughts. Then you start to see more clearly: ‘This is unpleasant’ – but the mind doesn’t engage with that. You begin to touch a deeper kind of silence, a deeper kind of peacefulness no longer dependent on pleasure and pain.

My own sense is that there is something profoundly beautiful about human consciousness, that we have this tremendous potential to realize the deepest peace. That seems to me to be the whole meaning of this human existence. In giving and serving, I find social meaning. It’s very meaningful. But I know all the issues of burnout. If giving is our raison d’être, if that’s all there is, it’s a recipe for disaster, because the giving is not balanced with inner silence, inner clarity. But if giving, self-sacrifice, is balanced with a sense of witnessing, wonderful things are possible.

While taking care of my mother I was religious in following my meditation. I made sure I kept a strong sitting practice going: every morning, every evening, and at midday if possible. It can be very helpful, because then you can always monitor where you’re at. With sitting practice you see, ‘Oh, this is what I picked up today; this is the kind of emotional stress the body is feeling now; this is the kind of material I need to process now.’

That kind of maintenance work – awakening – is tremendously important for developing the Path. Meditation done haphazardly or infrequently is better than not doing it at all, but the deeper insights and understanding of oneself come from a really steady sitting practice. That’s probably one of the reasons why I became a monk, because I couldn’t do it without the reminders and support of the monastic form. I wasn’t a very disciplined guy. It’s as simple as that.

Lay life is hard because there usually aren’t the cultural reminders of silence, of stillness; the common cultural reminders in lay life usually involve distraction. Yet when we come to a place like Chithurst, we really appreciate it: ‘Ah, silence, stillness, morality, Buddha, awakened … ’

These reminders are what you need to bring into your home, through shrines, through discipline, through friendships … The sitting practice is very important because there’s a stillness there, and enquiry and a presence that is very edifying. It shows us a great deal and it also builds a lot of parami – perfection of one’s character – a lot of subtlety. And that subtlety then plays out in the more coarse, difficult and complex parts of our lives, etc.
2013, or 2556 according to the Buddhist calendar, will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Dhammapala Monastery in Switzerland. It was founded by Ajahn Thiradhammo in 1988 in very uncertain and modest circumstances, and was initially located in a two-storey flat in an apartment block situated in a suburb of Bern. Since then the monastery can look back on quite an eventful history, and not only because the monks moved in 1991 from an urban apartment to a large former hotel in Kandersteg. After their arrival in the new premises the monks also had to deal with a long drawn-out project for renovating and restructuring the building, not to mention continuous comings and goings within the community.

The changeable side of monastic communities in general has been particularly visible this last year at Dhammapala, as the entire community has actually changed several times. As the only steady element in the midst of all this movement, the senior monk has felt slightly bemused and perplexed at times, but such challenges are quite usual in a Sangha context. For me personally the main lesson has consisted in going with the ebb and flow of events, rather than fighting against them or trying desperately to stay in control of everything. Instead I had the impression that quite a bit of trust was called for, trust not only in the individual actors of the play, but in the play itself; in other words, a trust in the wider context. So if I begin to feel that I am not in sole charge of my surroundings, and that things don’t always happen according to my ideas and wishes, I really have only two options: either I make an even greater effort to arrange things according to my own wishes, or I simply trust and let go.

However, trusting and letting go doesn’t mean becoming totally inactive. It doesn’t exclude effort. An attitude of ‘as well as’ seems to me both practically usable and highly effective for reducing stress. To give a free adaptation of one of Luang Por Chah’s mottos: ‘First give your best, then let go.’ This letting go should be taken literally, without any hidden agendas or expectations concerning its results.

We very often struggle to recognize at what point we have actually done our best, in order to eventually let go. Associated with this is the treacherous fear that we could perhaps have done a little bit more. No one can free us from this kind of nagging doubt. It is solely up to us to identify those complicated and sometimes compulsive tendencies in our own minds, and to consciously sense how they contribute to the build-up in our hearts of pressure, the pressure of dukkha. And not only to recognize the dukkha factor, but also to penetrate the dynamics of how the controlling and judging mind manoeuvres itself again and again into a cul-de-sac, in perfect cooperation with the accompanying emotions. Instead, a relaxed but vigilant approach to our own experience, based on a detached intimacy with the activities of heart and mind, can lead to genuine release from those irksome tendencies as the natural result of our own insight. If our inner realization is sufficiently precise and deep, we will be completely released from a recurring dilemma; otherwise, more patience and perseverance are needed. The inner challenges knock on our door persistently until they meet the willingness to attend to them skilfully. All this requires a continuous contemplative lifestyle and practice, in which we are basically willing to include the whole spectrum of our day-to-day experiences within our own personal observations.

At Dhammapala the first three months of the year were devoted to our monastic Winter Retreat. We call it the ‘Snows’ up here rather than the ‘Rains’. It implies a period of complete stability regarding the outside world for us, as the whole community usually stays put during the entire three months. The period is predominantly devoted to stillness, study and meditation. During the 2012 Winter Retreat we were joined by additional Sangha members for parts of this period of seclusion. I personally had a period of time away at the very beginning of the Winter Retreat, when I participated in a large Sangha gathering at Wat Pah Nanachat and Wat Nong Pah Pong in Thailand. The reason for this was the twentieth anniversary of the death of our teacher Luang Por Chah. Hundreds of monks, a few nuns and thousands of Thai lay folk came together for a week of communal pūjās and meditations, Dhamma reflections and dialogue groups, honouring the heritage of Luang Por Chah in the most suitable way.
Towards the end of the Winter Retreat, Ajahn Thiradhammo once again offered a meditation workshop in Thai at Dhammapala. He has been doing this regularly since his departure from Switzerland in 2005, but this year may well be the last time he revisits his former residence. Since March 2012 he no longer operates as the senior monk of Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand, but has chosen to live a more independent life, free from communal responsibilities, agendas and future schedules. At present he is residing in Thailand.

In April Tan Nandiyo, who had been living with us for three years, initiated a succession of changes within the Dhammapala community during the year. He had formally finished his five-year period of basic monastic training and it was time for him to move on to new horizons. As a replacement for Tan Nandiyo we were joined during the spring by Portuguese monk Tan Kāñcano, and Anagārika Ollie was replaced by American Anagārika Michael. Tan Kāñcano left Dhammapala temporarily after a few months, to help establish the first stages of a new Buddhist Vihara in his hometown of Lisbon (see article on page 20).

At the beginning of the formal Rains Retreat (Vassa) in early August, we experienced a genuine novelty at Dhammapala: for the first time ever we welcomed two Thai monks for the entire Rains period. During those three months Ajahn Thanissaro and Tan Buddhivaro became highly appreciated members of our community. Their presence also triggered a joyful response within the Swiss Thai community. We were also joined by Polish Sāmanera Kimbilo and French Anagārika Yann, to complete the group of five who spent the whole Vassa period at Dhammapala. Towards the end of the Vassa the community cards were shuffled once again. The two Thai monks went back to their home country and Sāmanera Kimbilo and Anagārika Yann returned to their English monasteries. In early December Tan Kāñcano returned from Portugal, and together with German monk Tan Bodhinando and Irish Anagārika Neil completed a totally renewed community constellation.

Every autumn, activity around the monastery seems to increase and a lot of energy is definitely needed during this time: we had several Open University visits, as well as weekend retreats, various visits to Swiss meditation groups, almsgiving ceremonies in the monastery and invitations to Kathina ceremonies at other places, not to mention our own Kathina, which again took place at Hinterkappelen near Bern.

Looking at the long list of annual events within and around a monastery, one can easily get the impression that they are what life in the monastery is mainly all about, that this is what describes the character of such a place. But this impression does not accord with the actual experience of its residents or its many visitors. A close look at and, still more, the experience of daily monastic life clearly show that it’s not the various activities taking place there which are decisive. They are definitely not what gives the monastery its right to exist. Its crucial element consists of the continuous devotion of all participants to a spiritual practice and lifestyle dedicated solely to the Dhamma or to the process of awakening. This collective effort and practical application under the guidance of the Buddhist teachings creates a field of energy made up of stillness and contemplation, which is directly noticeable to a perceptive heart.

Already, even during the early stage of planning ahead for the coming year, we are giving a lot of attention to ensuring that a good balance is struck between activities within the monastery and so-called ‘contemplative non-doing.’ Thus the conventional level of planning and organization can fulfil its intended purpose within a monastic environment. The main function is to protect a contemplative atmosphere, rather than to create many ‘spiritual activities’ for the monastery’s annual agenda.

As ever, we invite all those people who already have a strong commitment to the Dhamma and a sense of close connection to the monastery to renew these qualities again and again. This invitation is of course equally valid for everyone else, of no matter what denomination, who would like to devote themselves to the adventure of exploring and liberating the human heart and mind.

Ajahn Khemasiri
Recently I led a day-long retreat on the theme of contentment. And of course that’s a good theme for all of us – the aspect of learning how to be content with both the circumstances around us as well as our own mind. Sometimes the agitation, restlessness, negativity and fault-finding that the mind cranks out is not so much about any big thing that’s happening outside, it almost invariably a lack of contentment internally. When the mind is internally unable to find contentment, externally it finds something to be excited about, upset about, agitated about, have an opinion about. And it’s usually really believable! We come up with the logic, all of the good reasons to justify our state – and there’s plenty of good reasons if we look for them. But oftentimes what’s overlooked is the question, ‘Why can’t I be content with this present moment, with this circumstance, with my mind and feelings as they are?’

This is a really important investigation. It’s a fundamental basis for progress in practice. Until we learn how to direct our attention in that way, we’re almost always driven by discontent and end up being caught in some sort of sensual fantasy or internal rant, or something that at least takes us out of the present moment. The challenge is to be able to draw attention and really investigate, ‘How can I be content with this present moment, with myself?’

When the Buddha talked about being a refuge unto oneself, and taking Dhamma as refuge, well, it’s not the Dhamma of discontent that one takes as refuge. It’s the Dhamma of contentment, the ability to not be pulled away from the present moment. This is absolutely essential when we’re talking about meditation. The ability to be content with the breath or content with one’s meditation object; this is an essential factor for the mind to become really settled, really peaceful and still.

These aspects of investigation around contentment are very important. In the Suttas the Buddha describes contentment as one of the characteristics of a great being. It’s also the characteristic of a Noble One, an Aryan. Being content with one’s robes, almsfood, lodging, and with one’s cultivation, one’s meditation. And not only being content with that, but – because of that contentment – not lifting oneself up and not putting others down. This is a distinguishing characteristic of somebody who has actually experienced Dhamma and takes Dhamma as refuge. There’s no need to lift oneself up and put others down, to compare.

This aspect of contentment is a fruitful area for investigation. All of us can experiment with it; all of us can find ways to draw our hearts closer to this peaceful quality.
The Sangha
The resident Sangha at Hartridge of Ajahn Jutindharo and Suvaco Bhikkhu were joined by Sumitta on 5 August, when Nathalie LeCourt took the Eight Precepts with Ajahn Candasiri, one of the senior nuns from Amaravati. It was a very inspiring and well-attended ceremony, and a wonderful day for our community.

If you enter the monastery conservatory you are very likely to find next to Winky, our cat, Poppy, Sumitta’s elderly terrier. They have become great companions, snoozing in the sun.

Our small community is in good heart. We continue the tradition of making the Dhamma available through regular teachings and meditation classes, and welcoming guests, be it just for a cup of tea or a longer stay. All find their stays, whether for retreat or for other involvement in the monastic life such as working on building repairs or in the woodlands, rewarding and supportive. We are also happy to be able to offer fellow monastics and supporters a well-deserved retreat space (recently Ajahns Dhammanando, Gandhasīlo and Candasiri, and Josh – the retreat manager from Amaravati – all spent time at Hartridge).

Events, news and visits
During the year we were visited by several of the senior living disciples of Luang Por Chah, as part of tours they were making of monasteries in Europe. They all seemed to appreciate the rural simplicity of Hartridge, and the friendly and personal relationships that are possible in a small community. Along with the visits last year of Luang Pors Liem, Anek and Sopha, these occasions have been a big boost for our Thai friends, very encouraging for our resident monks, and great fun! Luang Por Sopha of Wat Kao Wan Chai in Korat province has taken a particular interest in Hartridge, and his active support includes three visits in the last eighteen months. In Thailand, after Luang Por Chah’s stroke and subsequent incapacity, it was he who took the initiative to bring Luang Por’s senior disciples together and establish the twice-annual community meetings that sustain the character of the Wat Pah Pong Sangha. Luang Por Sopha is actively helping to raise support for our Dhamma Hall building project.

Development
Progress on the Dhamma Hall project has been gradual. In terms of actual construction, we are at the point of making a start to put up a replacement workshop building. This is preparatory to dismantling the existing workshop and other outbuildings, before we can begin on the new accommodation and Dhamma Hall. At this point we envisage beginning the main works in 2014, depending on funds. The Sangha and monastery trustees continue to be inspired and hugely encouraged by the generous giving for this project. Since the launch of the project in autumn 2011 nearly £50,000 has been raised, which together with funds previously accumulated have brought us to £110,000 of the initial £250,000 funding target. There has been a very enthusiastic response from local Thai people, who have arranged several almsgiving events, including a big almsgiving on 29 July to mark the start of the rainy season – and with nearly 200 people at the monastery the rain duly obliged! ☘
How Things Should Be and The Way It Is – by Ajahn Sucitto

The man was eager to speak, unusually so for a newcomer to the monastery and its weekly tea-time. ‘Questions and Comments.’ After a few initial pleasantries, the other guests were content to quietly mull things over, but ‘Ted’ (not his real name) jumped in. There was an experience that had shaken him to the core a decade or so ago, and he had finally found a time and place to give it voice.

Ted had committed to volunteer work in a drought-prone area of Africa – medicine, work on the land, anything he could do. People were malnourished and infant mortality high. On the too-frequent bad years, the meagre crop failed altogether. The villagers had a few goats that survived by nibbling scrubby grass and thorn bushes. For Ted, working there meant meeting a hopelessness that seemed as inevitable and implacable as the sun. As volunteers know, finding the emotional resilience to persist in such a situation is as much part of the work as anything one can do physically; in fact one of the values of the physical work, however inadequate the results may seem, is that it provides a relief from the grinding force of helplessness. Doing something helps to dull that edge.

However, what had stirred him most deeply was the mental state of the villagers themselves. They were bright-eyed and lived lightly; they weren’t always happy, but neither were they patiently enduring or grimly surviving. They were as void of such shields as they were of bitterness or despair. Somehow, they could dance and sing and laugh: it didn’t make sense. But what turned his mind completely upside-down was that when the time came for him to leave, these people who had as near to nothing as makes little difference, insisted on giving him one of their goats. It was all they had.

That contradictory response had challenged Ted’s sense of living a meaningful life in secular materialist terms. How was it that people who had so little, so much less security and comfort than he had, were yet happier than him? And a further question kept nagging: In terms of freedom from stress and inner conflict, how far does the conventional direction of getting a successful career, a car and a mortgage go?

I paused and listened to what was happening within me. ‘They didn’t have a “should be”,’ was what I offered, waiting for anything further to arise in my mind, ‘they didn’t have an idea of how things should be.’ The statement seemed simplistic, even callous if developed as an ideological response to the world’s suffering. However, as is often the case when one listens deeply to what is being expressed, the comment that emerged touched the moment’s truth.

As we moved into dialogue, it was easy enough to explore the degree to which the emotionally-charged notion of ‘the way it should be’ was a major source of suffering to us well-fed, clothed and comfortably-sheltered people. ‘Should be’ – expectations and assumptions about everything from other people, the weather, the government and the global economy – formed clouds that hovered over most of us for periods of time and cast shadows of lost promise, of frustration, and of further struggles to get things right.

Because, although the sense that the society, life and oneself weren’t as good as they should be was a presence in our hearts, it was difficult to get a realistic picture of a scenario that would suit everyone. Furthermore, as things had never been the way they should be … on a statistical basis alone, that made it unlikely that they ever would. A few moments’ investigation also questioned as to who it is that knows, or what is it in us that tells us, how things should be. And on what grounds? How many people as we meet them, and how many situations that arise, can actually fit into any ideal state? Wouldn’t it feel freer, wouldn’t our minds feel more open to come to terms with what was actually happening without that sense of ‘it shouldn’t be like this.’

However, there’s an uneasiness about letting go of how things should be. Would that commit us to a state of indifferent passivity? What about aspiration? And compassion? Do we just watch the pangs of the world and the wincing and pushing of our minds until we give up? Is that what ‘letting go’ is about?

There’s a story by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges that makes a point about the wrong kind of letting go. Called The Immortal, it’s an exploration of a theme, a parable of sorts. The central theme of this story is one of a quest for immortality, for freedom from death and for the paradise that would ensue. After a long trek across a desert, the narrator comes across a paradoxical city. It is elaborately constructed of streets that lead to dead-ends, of labyrinths, of great doorways that open onto pits, of irregular cupolas and columns; this crazy city is also uninhabited. In the desert that surrounds the city are some scrawny sub-humans clothed in rags and eating little. One of these, a being who is accompanying the narrator as a guide, only manages to speak – and with difficulty – when a provident rainfall washes their faces. He, it turns out, is Homer, and has become immortal, as have all the sub-humans in the surrounding desert. So, the fable unfolds. Being immortal, these people are under no pressure, and have nothing driving them on to reach deadlines. Nothing will kill them, so there is nothing to be concerned about. They see everything pass away, so they are free from the pangs of unrequited love, and from
...I live in awe of how the peace of the Way It Is emerges out of meeting, purely, what arises.

the gnawing envy of others. Nothing needs be built, nothing is precious and made poignant by its unrepeatability; hence there is nothing that needs to be expressed. So they look at each other with indifference; and when one of their number falls into a quarry he spends seventy years in this pit burning with thirst before anyone throws him a rope to haul him out. Building the crazy city was the work of these immortals, a final expression, before they abandoned even that, of the meaninglessness of an endless future devoid of moral purpose, compassion and self-sacrifice. So is this immortality the ending of birth and death, the extinction of desire and the way to the Deathless that the Buddha advocated? Surely not – these immortals are the living dead. The plight of the African villagers offers more in terms of living freedom.

The human predicament needs to be looked into fully and holistically; it needs to include not just the world as something ‘out there’, but the ‘inner’ world of our attitudes, reactions and responses. Actually it needs more than looking into – this holistic experience, in which there is no real separation, has to be entered and fully felt. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel. No sane mind can advocate poverty and infant mortality – but can we open and fully feel.

It’s all so unfair – but the Buddha shot this arrow, the truth of dukkha, as an opening to an Awakening that brings about our highest happiness. Yes, in one of his own moving parables, (Samyutta 56.46) the Buddha sets up the scenario whereby what is offered to you is the possibility of being stabbed with spears one hundred times in the morning, one hundred times in the afternoon and one hundred times in the evening. In this parable, this ‘stab-a-thon’ will happen every day for one hundred years – at the end of which you will realize and Awaken through the Four Noble Truths. ‘If someone makes you that offer’, says the Buddha, ‘accept it.’ Realizing as it really is the truths of suffering, its arising, its ceasing and the Path to that ceasing will be for our long-lasting welfare. And this process will also be accompanied by happiness and joy.

However, the Buddha didn’t teach these Four Noble Truths to uninitiated beginners; only when the heart was made ready by reflections and practices of generosity, morality and renunciation would he deliver the truths that release it. And that’s the clue. Because these practices introduce us to the holistic sense – ‘to others as to myself’ – and also check the rush towards sense-gratification that is a primary obstacle to staying holistic. The African tribe, by being a collective, had that sense; together they could dance, grieve and share what they had. Because of this shared sense they were not bowed down with the suffering of ‘Why me?’ This sense of being part of a universality has a capacity that our self-importance blocks; here is the bull’s eye to which the arrow of suffering brings transformation when we no longer deny or rail against it. Because if attention is steadied on that vulnerable point, the response of true knowing, selflessness, and compassion issues forth. This is the Awakening to the Way It Is – a Dhamma that does not shift and die. It’s a Dhamma that never tells you how you or they or it should be, but it unerringly makes it clear what you should do.

In Dhamma-practice we are encouraged to relinquish guilt, regret and fantasies around trying to be clearer, stronger or more loving than we are, and to replace all that with here-and-now acceptance of ourselves and each other. That acceptance is that there’s nothing that we have to be; in fact that there’s nothing that we ever can be – except the awareness that the images and impression of self, other and the world are subject to change. Yet that acceptance requires a subtle action, a shift to the holistic sense.

Of course, to put the conventional reality aside and to step out of the regretted past, the mundane present and the anxious future; to come to a place of timeless, selfless response – that too takes some doing. But if we don’t do that, our minds either spin around trying to create a happy world, or close to shut out its pangs. Either of these currents, ‘becoming’ (bhava) and ‘negation’ (vibhava), obscure the holistic sense – which is the only sense that can transmute suffering into unflustered compassion. So what we can do, what in fact we should do if we seek our own welfare, is to come out of those currents. And that means developing the emotional and psychological capacity to steady our awareness and meet what arises without holding on or closing awareness. This is uncomfortable and confusing at first, because to give up controlling or defending the heart against life confronts the ego. Initiation into wholeness isn’t ego-gratifying. But it’s from this attention as it deepens beyond the currents of bhava/vibhava that the Awakening response will emerge. Putting aside the ‘should be’ therefore doesn’t mean putting aside being touched and responding. It means that our true response has to be one that doesn’t get bogged down in, regret or deny life. To live truthfully is to live lightly.

(Continued on page 29)
In late April through early May in 2012, Ajahn Viradhammo and Ajahn Sucitto were travelling on invitation in Yunnan, S.W. China. Here follows a selection of images from that journey.

The trip began in the southernmost prefecture, Xipsongbanna, which is the home of the Dai (Thai) people. This is evident in the language, the Thai Theravada culture, the sub-tropical climate, and the spontaneous warm response to Buddhist monks. Above: the Tropical Botanical Gardens.

After a few days, the party went north to Dali, which boasted markets with enormous cakes of Pu Er tea (above). From here, the group scaled Chickenfoot Mountain (below), a local holy mountain, with temples on its slopes and at its peak.

Dali is in central Yunnan. From there the group travelled North-West across the Yangtze, Mekong and Salween rivers, eventually following the Salween as it runs from Tibet parallel to Burma.
The northwards journey brought the party into contact with Tibetan people living in Yunnan, who by and large were Catholics. The Tibetan-style monasteries were peopled by other nationalities in the Chinese range of nationalities (amongst whom the Dai, the Bai, the Naxi as well as Han Chinese predominate). Living in the mountains gets cold and simple – one of the unheated monasteries registered 15 degrees below zero in the winter. Buddhist monasteries (below), mosques, and temples of many kinds are open in Yunnan.

On turning south and east, the group lodged in Lujiang, which is overlooked by Jade Dragon Mountain – a peak of over 5,000 metres (below left). This area is also renowned for Tiger-Leaping Gorge, where the Yangtze is squeezed between mountains into a roaring green torrent.

All in all, a satisfying, if tiring, trip!
A New Year
Like all of our monasteries in the western and northern hemispheres, Amaravati begins each new year with a three-month Winter Retreat, a time of reflection, quietude and stillness. This retreat offers our monastic community the opportunity to step back from the regular routine, while a dedicated team of lay supporters generously come to look after the day-to-day running of this large monastery. The resident sangha here greatly appreciated the generous support offered by this year’s team, with their harmonious presence and skilful attention to the needs of the community. Sādhu anumodanā (we rejoice in the good that has been done!)

Two major events within our Buddhist tradition took place during the winter. The first was the twentieth anniversary of the death of Ven. Ajahn Chah, who passed away on 16 January 1992 at the age of seventy-three. Amaravati marked this event on the lunar observance night which coincidentally fell on that date.

The other major event that took place during the Winter Retreat was Māgha Pūjā, which fell on 7 March, the full moon day of that month. This day commemorates the spontaneous assembly of twelve hundred and fifty arahants in the Buddha’s presence, and was occasion on which the Buddha delivered the Ovāda-Pātimokkha Gāthā, a summary of the main points of the Dhamma.

Events and Festivals
After the Winter Retreat ended, the first significant event which occurred at Amaravati was the annual gathering of elders from our monasteries in the West. Sangha meetings took place from 3 – 8 April and gave our senior monks and nuns the opportunity to discuss important issues and share their experiences of living this life and being the ‘leaders’ of our worldwide group of communities. This gathering also gave the wider community the chance to connect with sangha members who may only visit Amaravati once a year.

This year, the lunar observance of Vesakha Pūjā, commemorating the birth, enlightenment and final passing away of the Buddha, fell on Monday, 4 June. Historically, all these events are understood to have occurred on the full-moon day of May or June, depending on the year, as this is a lunar date. Vesakha Pūjā is perhaps the most significant observance, when followers of all Buddhist traditions honour and commemorate our Teacher. Amaravati celebrated this event on Sunday, 3 June with an all-day programme that included the opportunity to reaffirm the Three Refuges and Five Precepts, and to listen to a Dhamma reflection offered in the Temple during the afternoon.

Āsālha Pūjā fell on 2 August this year. This day commemorates the Buddha’s first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. The evening celebration included a Dhamma reflection offered by Ajahn Amaro, as well as a traditional circumambulation of the monastery cloister, with candles, incense and flowers.

Visits
In the spring Amaravati was fortunate to host three elders from our sangha in Thailand. From 1 May to 6 June Luang Por Boonchoo of Wat Pah Bodhiyan, Luang Por Kum of Wat Pah Thai Pattana and Luang Por Damrong of Wat Pah Pleum Pattana vis-

Amaravati Woods with visiting Thai elders along with Ajahn Amaro and other members of the Sangha.

Ajahn Amaro with friends and supporters on the day of the Luang Pu Mun shrine consecration ceremony.
visited Amaravati, as well as most of the other monasteries here in Europe which are associated with Ajahn Chah. We greatly appreciated their presence and the opportunity for both the monastic and lay communities to meet them and hear their teachings.

A few other very important visits took place during the spring. Ajahn Jayasāro, who resides in Thailand, visited Amaravati for a few days in May and offered two Dhamma talks to the community. Former Amaravati resident Ajahn Vajiro, who most recently spent ten years residing here but left our monastery last autumn, returned for a two-week stay before departing for Portugal to establish a new monastery there (see article on page ?). He had spent the previous six months travelling, mostly in New Zealand, before returning to Europe and new horizons in Portugal. Ajahn Viradhammo, abbot of Tisarana Buddhist Monastery near Perth, Ontario, Canada, spent a couple of weeks here in July. It was this former abbot of Amaravati’s first stay here since 1999. During his visit he led a ten-day retreat at the Amaravati Retreat Centre and offered a Dhamma reflection to the resident community on 18 July. His long-overdue visit was greatly appreciated, and we hope to see him return here in the not-too-distant future.

Community

The past few months have seen a number of changes in the community here. On Sunday, 13 May, Anagārika Stanislaus formally requested the sāmanera pabbajjā (novice ‘Going Forth’ ceremony), receiving the new name Kimbilo, donning the ochre robes and undertaking the Ten Precepts. Also on that day Neil Dunphy entered the anagārika training by requesting the Eight Precepts.

On Sunday, 29 July Sāmanera Gambhiro of Aruna Ratanagiri Monastery (Harnham) and Sāmanera Narindo of Amaravati were formally accepted into the Bhikkhu Sangha at an upasampadā (bhikkhu ordination) ceremony held in the Amaravati Temple. Ajahn Amaro led the ceremony as upajjhāya or preceptor, and it was attended by family members and friends of the two new bhikkhus, along with many well-wishers from near and far.

In June we were joined by Ajahn Dhammabhinando, a senior monk from Thailand. Originally from a village near Ajahn Chah’s monastery, he ordained as a sāmanera at the age of twelve and more recently spent one year living at Wat Pah Nanachat.

More recently we have welcomed another two new anagārikas to the community. Anagārika Graham and Anagārika Meng joined us in ceremonies held on 25 August and 21 October respectively. Also in October, Amaravati said goodbye to Anagārikā Chiara who has decided to return to lay life after three years of living in our monasteries in the UK. We wish her well.

November saw a number of other changes to the community, including the departure of Portuguese bhikkhu Ven. Appamādo, who has gone to spend one year at the new monastery in Portugal led by Ajahn Vajiro. Amaravati welcomed back Ajahn Ratanawanno, who lived here for a number of years and has returned after residing in Thailand for the past two years. In early December we welcomed to our community Ven. Ñānavisuddhi, who has joined us after living at Harnham where he originally ordained and has lived for the past four years. Mid-December saw the return of Ajahn Jayanto, who had spent most of the previous year on solitary retreat in Thailand.

Lastly, this autumn Amaravati said goodbye to Ajahn Ariyasīlo, who departed for Australia on 28 November to take up residence at the Buddhist Society of Victoria in Melbourne. This is not the first time that he has resided there, so it’s something of a ‘going home’ for him. We wish him well for this move and want to express our deep gratitude for all that he offered the community during his time here.
The Rains Retreat and Kathina Season

The annual Vassa or Rains Retreat season – the traditional three-month period of the year when monks and nuns determine to remain resident in one place – commenced on 3 August this year, the day after Āsālha Pūjā. The Vassa tends to be a quieter time of year in terms of festivals and major events, focusing more instead on offering the lay community an opportunity to attend retreats and teachings. From 5 August to 28 October weekly Sunday afternoon Dhamma talks and Q&A sessions were offered by Amaravati abbot Ajahn Amaro and other senior monks and nuns. These events are always appreciated and were very well attended. For the monastic community, this is the time of our year when we focus on the study of Vinaya, the disciplinary code for monks and nuns. It is also when we take the precious opportunity to observe individual retreat periods, which allow us to step back from the daily monastic routine and develop our spiritual practice in solitude. Staying together for three entire months also gives us the chance to develop our sense of community.

Two significant events occurred at Amaravati during the Vassa. On Sunday, 16 September a Tort Pah Bah (Almsgiving Ceremony) was held. This ceremony was organized by Khun Plœn Phetchkue and Khun Tarinee Kittipeerachon (who also represented her mother Khun Jumlaung Sinbunyanont), along with M.L. Pagamal Kasemtrsi and Khun Anintita Posakrisna, who both also acted as representatives for the Siamsaamtri School in Bangkok. They all came specially from Thailand in order to support Amaravati. Their enormous generosity and kindness were greatly appreciated, as was their joyful presence. The ceremony was also attended and supported by many well-wishers and regular visitors to the monastery.

The second exceptional event this autumn was the consecration ceremony for the new Luang Pu Mun shrine in the Amaravati Temple, which took place on Wednesday, 19 September. The sponsor of the shrine, Jane Brown, the donor of the statue, Khun Plœn Phetchkue (who was coincidently here for the Tort Pah Bah) and John Groves, who both designed and constructed the shrine, were all able to be present for this auspicious ceremony, which included moving the ashes of Luang Ta Mahā Boowa from the Sala to the new shrine. A number of monastery supporters were also in attendance that day including George Sharp, former Chairman of English Sangha Trust and the person who originally invited Amaravati founder and former abbot Luang Por Sumedho to come to England. He was also responsible for inviting Luang Ta Mahā Boowa to visit London in 1974.

The Vassa ended on 30 October, the full moon day of that month. This is called Pavāranā Day, the day when the monastic community formally invites feedback from the monastics we have lived with during the Vassa. This tradition was established by the Buddha himself, who praised the use of feedback or admonishment as a vital part of a monk or nun’s growth as
a samana or spiritual seeker. The one-month Kathina season began on the following day.

As soon as the Vassa was over, ordained members of the sangha started taking the opportunity to accept invitations to travel, and after the Kathina ceremony monks and nuns began moving on to take up residence at other monasteries or suitable living places.

During the Kathina season Amaravati abbot Ajahn Amaro travelled to California for the Kathina at Abhayagiri Monastery, the monastery he established with co-abbot Luang Por Pasanno. This was the first time he had returned to Abhayagiri since leaving there to take up the role of abbot here two years ago. Readers may recall that last year Luang Por Pasanno visited Amaravati for our Kathina.

This year’s Kathina at Amaravati was held on Sunday, 25 November, and was once again a Royal Kathina, with the Royal Kathina Robe graciously offered by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand through a representative from the Royal Thai Embassy. The day was organized and led by The Saturday Group. Ven. Chao Khun Bhavanaviteht (Luang Por Khemadhammo) OBE, abbot of The Forest Hermitage in Warwickshire presided over the ceremonies as the guest of honour and offered a Dhamma reflection in the afternoon. This joyous event was extremely well attended by a large number of warm-hearted well-wishers.

Heading towards 2013

As winter approaches, people are beginning to gather once again for the next Winter Retreat, which is scheduled to begin at the start of the New Year and continue through until 31 March (Easter Sunday). So that was 2012. One year is drawing to a close, another is about to commence, with the passing of time marked as always by religious and social observances. For those who are interested in the Dhamma teachings of the Buddha, all parts of our year give us the opportunity to practise and develop the path of peace leading to liberation.
Ajahn Kusalo is currently Abbot of Bodhinyanarama. He was born in 1952 and grew up in Auckland, New Zealand. In 1990 he joined Ajahn Viradhammo at Bodhinyanarama Monastery, Wellington, New Zealand, receiving entry into the Bhikkhu Sangha there in 1992. In 1994 he was invited to join Ajahn Sumedho at Amaravati Monastery, where he lived for six years. He lived for eight years in Canada, the last five of those years being spent developing Tisarana, the new monastery west of Ottawa. A short visit to Bodhinyanarama in 2011 resulted in Ajahn Kusalo’s moving back to his home monastery in 2012 as Abbot, following on from Ajahn Tiradhammo.

'Tis the Season

Musical can create very powerful mental impressions, some of them useful, some just an incidental part of our collected mental assortment and some annoyingly intrusive. Certainly during my early ordained years I had to deal with the lingering reverberation of many melodies in the last category. After many years of melodic monastic chanting the noise has abated considerably, and has been replaced by a wholesome, happy background hum. One of the remnants of the first category comes from a Mr. Bob Dylan. Some of you may recall...

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen,
And keep your eyes wide,
The chance won’t come again,
For the times they are a-changin’.

The Buddha’s teaching on impermanence and emphasis on present moment awareness points to the ‘truth of the way things are’, a description of nature, natural law. Like gravity and the air we breathe, change is like ‘just part of the scene, man.’ It is so obvious that we forget and need reminders, teachings, a tradition, to make clear what we mostly already know to be true but so often easily forget. As I write, mid-September, I am planning a trip to visit my mother for Christmas, and am reminded that it will soon be the season to be jolly – and there is another mental jingle that lingers long, ‘Fa la la la la …’ (probably from an early Nordic dialect?). Yes, I must remember: must be jolly. And being jolly is certainly good, but the Buddha’s teaching points not so much to jolliness, but more directly to the suffering that obscures it. The path is not the attainment of some thing, some experience, but to the understanding of all things, all experiences.

Much of my youth was spent pursuing the dream, the jolliness experience. The goal was the pot of gold at rainbow’s end, Shangri-la, the eternal season of tinsel and glitter. Freedom from suffering was the plan, but the road then travelled invariably threw up a No Exit sign which was invariably ignored. The result was invariably the same – confusion, despair, disappointment – suffering. So let’s try another road? Open another ribbon-wrapped present? In retrospect I see that I never really questioned or wanted to question the Santa Claus story. I wanted it to be true and so it was true. But eventually truth will out. And eventually the teary-eyed children who have just caught their parents filling their Christmas stocking will dry their eyes and open to new possibilities, new roads of discovery.

And keep your eyes wide,
The chance won’t come again.

The awakening that comes on the cusp of clear seeing is so ephemeral, so delicate. The present moment rests on the razor’s edge, and balance is only maintained through attentive awareness and an interest and willingness to be with the infinitely narrow path, regardless of its quality. There needs to be a willingness to acknowledge and to open to what is seen. And so, for those of us with
'just a few tears in our eyes', we begin to see the benefit of deliberately putting ourselves into situations where we can watch, where we can witness the metaphorical or literal filling of our stocking-like minds with myth creation or reinforcement.

A monastery is such an environment for this study, a place where there is time and space to look and listen to our hearts, to observe the movements of the mind in the light of the Buddha’s teaching. A traditional structure creates a well defined container that offers a variety of scenarios where the habitual pattern of our self-myth-making is not supported, is even disallowed or contradicted. And within that framework the juxtaposition of stillness and business, solitude and community, space and form offers an array of mirrors to reflect and test the limits and clarity of our vision.

How well we see through Mara’s guise – be it red satin suit, or food or money, or sex or power, or youth ... the list is endless. Insights do arise, but they can often carry a conceptual or theoretical quality until tested against the metal of life. How deeply do we understand the razor’s edge without tasting a few drops of blood? And so we practise meditation. And we practise putting our practice into practice.

Bodhinyanarama is a wee spot at the end of an island on the edge of the map. One sometimes sees a warning on maps of uncharted territory: ‘Here be dragons’. Aye, where there be minds there be dragons. But the land is green and verdant, a soft, benign haven spread across the hills at the head of a long valley, with the space and all the requisites necessary to live the holy life.

I started monastic life here over twenty years ago and am happy to be ‘back home’. There is so much that delights: the wind in the pines, the melodic bird song, the ferns’ delicately unfolding fronds, the green on green hillsides that fold in a beguiling tangle of streams and valleys within valleys. And the dragons? A mixture of minds certainly can be a challenge, but so far the combination has proved extremely harmonious. There is a steady stream of guests from different parts of the country, and an amazing multicultural flow of people coming to offer the daily meal and other requisites.

There are men interested in taking up the Holy Life and ample facilities to support that. The future has a hazy outline, with various plans to rationalise and possibly extend existing lay accommodation and explore setting up a monastic hermitage at the top end of the property. The traditional model of a monastery as a place for monks to train and practise helps establish clear lines of demarcation between these two zones. The future is by definition unknown, and the best we can do is keep our eye on the goal and keep our ‘eyes wide’. Indeed, ’the times they are a-changin’, and all signs indicate changes for the good. That’s good enough for now.

Ajahn Kusalo
We, Venerable Kāñcano, Venerable Subhaddo and I, walked down from Monsanto, the Sacred Mountain, to the Rua Dom Cristovão Da Gama 22, in the afternoon of 18 July 2012. We had set off from Amaravati on Friday, 13 July, with Julian Wall driving us down to the ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao. The twenty-four hour ferry ride and the drive down, through Spain, seemed a good way to come into Portugal. We arrived there on the 16th through a little-used pass in the mountains of Gerês (Portela do Homem), then paused for a couple of nights before driving down to Lisbon. To walk the last couple of kilometres seemed the right thing to do.

The routine here is suitably ‘monastic’; morning and evening meditation and pūjā, and a meal before noon. Some laypeople have arranged a calendar where they can see if someone is booked to come to the monastery to offer a meal. That and the pindapat (almsround) are working very well for our daily support.

People are attending the pūjās, both in the evening and, a few, in the morning. People are also visiting in the afternoon. We are able to offer some introductory courses in Buddhism in English, using The Word of the Buddha. This book was used by Luang Por Sumedho and has been translated into Portuguese, (A palavra do Buddha), and so it seemed a reasonable place to begin. We have also been invited to offer talks at the Portuguese Buddhist Union (União Budista Portuguesa). And Venerable Subhaddo and I are learning Portuguese.

A man from Brazil has asked to come to stay, with the intention of continuing in training as an anāgārika, and with a view to full upasampadā somewhere eventually. He chose to come here as he speaks no English. We have had some visits from laypeople from the UK and we hope that these will continue. The journey does not need to take four days; a flight lasts about two and a half hours from London’s airports.

On 4 November a Tort Pah Bah (Almsgiving Ceremony) took place supported by the Thai Embassy and was also an opportunity to have an Open Day at the vihāra.

Venerable Appamādo travelled here for that, and later this autumn has booked to come to Portugal to help here for a year. Ajahn Chandapālo is booked to visit for a few days in December, and with luck there will be more visits from other ajahns.

Looking forward to the New Year, in January Venerable Dhammiko has booked to come to Portugal, and in April Venerable Mudito (a Brazilian who trained in Thailand and has been living in New Zealand) is due to visit for a couple of weeks.

To live in a quiet suburb is not what we are used to, and we are looking for other places more suitable for quiet and solitude, where we may be able to establish a monastery. But this is a promising beginning.

Ajahn Vajiro
Kutis for Harnham

In 2010 the trust body that supports Harnham Buddhist Monastery (a.k.a. Aruna Ratanagiri) was able to purchase additional property at the foot of Harnham Hill. The property consists of approximately four acres of a man-made lake (technically a reservoir) with another approximately five acres of immediate surrounding wetland and field.

As soon as the trust secured the land, the Sangha started on plans for its future use: three kutis (meditation huts), a tool shed, toilet facilities and a boardwalk around the lake.

One of the first things we actually did was designate the whole area as a wildlife sanctuary and, under the supervision of Penny Wakefield-Pearce, tree planting began. Penny is the monastery’s book-keeper and the trust’s secretary, but she is also a trained botanist. So far, about 2000 native shrubs have successfully taken root forming a hedgerow along the border with the adjacent agricultural land. And this year already we saw the colourful success of our wildflower meadow, with another 1000 or so saplings planted over the length of the property. A significant portion of the planting is an aspen grove dedicated to Luang Por Sumedho, paid for from donations given at Kathina 2010 when Luang Por last visited us here. Our relationship with the council has been less inspiring.

The already sluggish turnings of bureaucratic cogwheels appeared to slow ever further with drastic government spending cuts. This meant that getting started on construction took longer than we had hoped. However, wonderfully generous support from a wide range of friends of the community encouraged us to keep our aspirations alive and persist in corresponding with the Planning Authority. Finally, this summer we received the required permission for virtually all aspects of the project. Some of the photos show the building of foundations for the boardwalk. This initial stage of work should see almost half of the track, including a bridge over the weir, completed. We anticipate that by the time you read this article all the buildings will be in place and perhaps, during this year’s Winter Retreat, a couple of community members will be benefitting from the solitude of the new kutis.

Over the coming year we look forward to finishing the interior of the kutis and to bravely attempt building a nesting island for birds and critters in the shallow end of the lake. There is still plenty of room to plant more trees if you are interested to be involved. And if you wish to be part of sponsoring a plank or two of the boardwalk, you can find out how from our website <www.ratanagiri.org>

Clockwise from above: one of the new lakeside kutis, Penny Wakefield-Pearce and her daughter Hasel during a tree planting day, the new boardwalk, Ajahn Puñño at work on the project.
Perhaps you would not normally associate Central Italy with snowscapes but, in fact, there is a ski resort only forty minutes’ drive from Santacittarama. Midwinter, with a clear sky, the 2,200-metre-high Monte Terminillo makes a snowy backdrop to the monastery when viewed from the south. The monastery itself being at a much lower altitude – around 400 metres – usually receives nothing more than an occasional light dusting, which melts within a day or two. This year, however, was exceptional. About half way through the Winter Retreat – not long after Ajahn Chandapālo had returned from Thailand hoping that spring would be just around the corner – snow fell heavily over a couple of days, laying to a depth of at least half a metre and leaving the access road closed to traffic for nearly two weeks. Eventually we plucked up the courage and picked up shovels and managed to clear the road in order to allow a gas delivery, just as our fuel for heating and cooking was about to run out.

The snow added an extra depth to the silence of the retreat and prevented all but a few brave individuals from venturing out to the monastery, yet we did not lack for anything. It also added excessive weight to many trees and branches, bringing them crashing down to earth, fortunately without damaging any of the eleven kutis on the property. A positive outcome is that we now have enough firewood to fuel the wood-burning stoves in all the kutis for several years.

By the time a group of senior Thai monks arrived in June the weather had gone to the opposite extreme, in fact even the Thais were complaining about the excessive heat. We were very pleased to welcome three senior disciples of Luang Por Chah – Luang Pors Boonchoo, Kum and Damrong – each of them having been in the robes for around fifty years. Their presence was especially appreciated for the upasampadā – bhikkhu acceptance ceremony – which was held on Ajahn Chah’s birthday. This was the first upasampadā to be held at Santacittarama and so a historic and auspicious occasion. It was also the first upasampadā that Santacittarama’s abbot Ajahn Chandapālo has conducted since receiving the status of upajjhāyā or preceptor last year. The candidate, a young man from Latina – Sāmanera Kovido – was accepted into the ‘higher training’ and is now known as Bhikkhu Kovido. A large number of friends and supporters came to witness what was a very moving ceremony. A short film of the event can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/45587539>.

It has been said that when a young man is able to enter a local sangha and receive instruction in his native tongue, the Buddhadhamma can be considered as firmly established in that country. Interestingly, this was happening about one hundred years after the idea of establishing a Buddhist monastery in Italy was first mooted, as far as we know. In the year 1911 a German monk known as Ven. Nyānatiloka, one of the first western bhikkhus, spent some time in Rome as a guest of a music teacher and composer called Alessandro Costa. It soon became clear that the time wasn’t right and Ven. Nyānatiloka returned to Sri Lanka via Naples and Palermo. A couple of years later, in 1913, a book by Alessandro Costa entitled Filosofia e Buddhismo was published. It was perhaps the first book on Buddhism to be written in Italian. Soon after Ven. Nyānatiloka’s departure Alessandro Costa moved to a small town called Mompeo in the Sabina hills – less than ten miles away from Santacittarama – where he founded an orchestra that still continues to this day, one hundred years later. 
News from Santacittarama Buddhist Monastery

Opposite page: Buddha-rupa in the snow; this page from top:
Luang Por Boonchoo, Ajahn Chandapalo and Ven. Kovido, visiting elders lead the rice pindapat.
Walking the Path with Courage

A Dhamma reflection by Ajahn Mettā

When you embark on a spiritual path, or perhaps suddenly find yourself on one, you will notice that when you move deeper into it, it is asking you for some kind of renunciation. It does not matter which of the Buddhist traditions you investigate; you will see renunciation as one of the steps on this path.

I do not want to go too much into the Five Precepts and how ‘we should practise them’, but any path you follow will bring up questions like: what are my needs? What are the values I want to develop in this life? What are the values of this path that I have chosen to walk? Can I live by these values as much as possible and as much as I would like to? When we ask these questions, this is where courage comes in. Because we do need the courage to change. We do need the courage to look into our patterns, and as much as I would like to? When we ask these questions, this is where courage comes in. Because we do need the courage to change.

We do need the courage to look into our patterns, to ask: what parts of my life need more attention, more mindfulness, more kindness or more compassion? I think the very first step is something like an internal check-up. And I remember having done that myself. What do I see in the way I am living that needs to change? One important tool to use here is honesty. Can we be honest in relating to what we find when we do this?

It is up to each of us to make these choices, about where and how we step out of our usual, unreflected patterns of living. We become interested in a spiritual path because we see a need and want to change our lives. We look for ways to bring more depth, more meaning into it. More of the values which are important to us. We look for ways of manifesting them, bringing them to life and living them in our daily experiences. When you make these internal evaluations, you might find things that you really want to change. There are different reasons for this. It might be because they have become meaningless and no longer make much sense in your life. With these internal check-ups, you might also find things that are necessary for walking this path. Most likely, you will encounter the qualities of kindness, empathy, compassion or others that will need to be developed further.

That same moment of honesty, that very experience, brings up the quality of courage. It takes courage to turn away from distraction; to enter that place which is not easeful; to turn towards that which is painful; to acknowledge what needs to stop; to consider a change. It is not an easy thing to do. It involves reflecting on what is really needed here and now. How do we relate to unpleasantness? Of course, I do not mean to say that

following a spiritual path, practising, brings with it only difficult experiences. Of course, it doesn’t, or why would we want to do it in the first place? It does, however, require a lot of courage and determination to maintain our practice.

Yes, you will find very pleasant times, times where you experience peacefulness and ease, a calm that is very new to you. And it feels really good. In my personal experience, that was the attractive side of this path, of this new way of looking at life. But there are difficult times as well. Looking at the areas of pain, sadness, boredom, dissatisfaction and unease led me to question how I lived my life. Is there really a ‘red thread of fate’, is there something that carries through? Was there something that made this life worthwhile?

Naturally, we can do this most easily during our formal practice, when we have the time to do sitting or walking meditation. But we also need to find ways of integrating this into our ordinary lives. We will find ourselves in situations where change is necessary. In those situations, we need to gather our courage and look at the kind of response that would be appropriate and skilful. One thing we can ask ourselves again and again is: how much do I need? What are my real needs? Or on the more material level: how much do I want to take part in the flow of accumulating material belongings? Do I really need this new car? Do I really need a car at all? This is not one of the most crucial questions in this life; just consider it as an example of what we take for granted. How easily we do this without questioning the necessity of the things in our lives! When we ask this question of ‘what do I really need?’; what we are asking is: how do I want to live this life? How much energy, resources and attention do I want to put into accumulating material wealth and possessions? This is also related to other areas of our lives, and to our relationships with relatives, friends, coworkers and other people.

We might ask ourselves: how much energy, time and attention do I want to give to the practice? What place does the spiritual practice have in my life? Here, spiritual practice does not only mean formal meditation practice. It also means giving attention to our spiritual friends, spending quality time with people who are on the same path. Giving time and attention to a friend who might need some help, some support, someone to listen. Am I willing to give this? What is your understanding of practice in regard to this? Instead of spending time with your
friend, do you say, 'Sorry, I haven’t got time for you right now because I need to do some more sitting practice'? Ask yourself this. What is important? Are you still flexible in the way you relate to these situations?

When we look at the internal level of renunciation, what comes up is the question of how much we are able to turn towards suffering. When we look at the suffering in our lives, what are the areas that require more courage in order for us to relate to it? What are the areas where we know we need to develop restraint and what is needed in order to do that?

Let’s take a few moments right now to look into this. What are the areas in your life where you feel you need more courage, or where you feel more restraint would be helpful? For most of us, something will come up almost immediately. It could be another area you feel more restraint would be helpful? For most of us, something will come up almost immediately. It could be related to your work. It could be in regard to a relationship with another person. It might have to do with some kind of addiction. It may be an area where you don’t feel whole, where you feel something is missing. As you look into it, see if you can take the step toward being with the energetic or emotional experience of it. If it is something that is very strong, perhaps even overwhelming, be aware of how much you move into this, so that you don’t lose your foothold in awareness. In that case, just allow yourself to touch it. Be with it just for a little while.

If we aim our awareness in this direction, we will usually encounter the pain, the sadness, the frustration, or whatever emotional experience arises with it. If we make an internal space for this by connecting with it, with that emotional resonance, it can be brought into a place where there is a direct experience of it. It moves out of an unconscious place in the back of our mind and into the space of what is happening right now. By working in this way, you might also experience fear. Do not be surprised if this happens. See if you can simply acknowledge this. See if you can just make a bit of space for this fear to be part of the experience. Bringing courage into our practice really means that we are able to meet and relate to this fear. We are finding ways of connecting with it. We are connecting with the unpleasantness of the experience. We are trying to find ways where we can hold the experience of fear in a space of kindness. This requires an attitude of gentleness and acceptance.

Courage does not mean the absence of fear. Courage means having the resources and the energy to face the unpleasantness of fear, of painful experiences, and to relate in ways that will help us to take the next step. Look at your personal spiritual heroes. Bring somebody up in your mind. When you look at his or her life, consider what you value in this person. What is it that you respect? What do you admire in them? What is it that makes you look up to them? What is it that inspires you? You might find that it is their courage; their courage to continue where other people stop. Their courage to live up to their own values. To live and embody them.

When we dare to bring renunciation into our lives we experience unpleasantness, especially in the early stages. But we are giving up what we know is unwholesome and no longer makes sense to us. With courage, we can move into the direct experience of the pain, the frustration, the fear, the dissatisfaction. We begin to understand that these unwholesome states of mind do not support us. By staying with the direct experience and connecting with the present moment, we find ourselves in a different place where they can transform and dissolve. We connect with the places that we find hard to acknowledge and by doing this we come into contact with a deeper sense of being, both with ourselves and with those around us. When you walk the spiritual path, you must learn to use these tools, to work with them. Renunciation does not mean to cut yourself off from what you need. Real renunciation comes from a sense of fullness. It comes from an understanding, the feeling or experience of enough-ness, of fullness, of noticing what it is you really need. It is an experience of abundance, the knowing that we will be able to relate to our needs at the moment when we experience them. We do not have to hoard things just because there might come a time when we need them.

What is important to me in this life? What do I want to put my energy into? How do I want to live this life? When you ask these questions, you are really stepping out of self-centredness. You are stepping out of your little self and into something much bigger. This involves a shift in consciousness. An internal shift from assuming that you are in control of your life to embracing the unknown, being part of something that is beyond you. Connecting with the wider field of existence. In the world today, practising renunciation can have far-reaching consequences. It can help us, for example, to be more aware of the scarcity of our physical resources. This is extremely important at the moment, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. We should perhaps ask ourselves: how can we continue to live this kind of life in our present society? How sustainable is it? How long can we continue to use our resources in the way we do now? Or, to put it simply: do we need all the things we are so used to having?

When we step out of our self-centred views in this way, we are obliged to consider not only our own resources, but also the resources of others. If I’m using up so much of these resources, what will be left for others? Renunciation is not just a personal issue but relates to the world around us. How can I share the abundance in my life with others who have less? This question is not only relevant to our own personal lives, but on an international scale. Again, this does not relate only to the material aspects of our lives. It includes our social and spiritual qualities, our goodness of heart. How do we spend our time and how much can we give to others? How much of our time do we waste? Consider this: what is going on in your mind when you have a day of practice, when you are working, when you are with your friends or your partner, when you are with your children? Are you really ‘there’? Are you present? Are you connecting with the people in your life? We need to develop the courage to look at these things, the courage to look at the pain they might bring up. Of course, when we connect with the present moment, we do not only experience pain. But if we are connecting, it doesn’t really matter what we are experiencing. When we put our heart fully into it, we can also experience and share joy, peacefulness, empathy, compassion and contentment, qualities which can nourish others as well as ourselves.
The following reflections are extracts from Ajahn Amaro’s recently published book Inner Listening: Meditation on the Sound of Silence, describing a meditation practice often employed by Ajahn Sumedho, and found in various spiritual traditions, but which is not widely known in the Southern Buddhist world.

If you are able to hear that inner sound you can use the simple act of listening to it as another form of meditation practice. It can be used just like the breath as an object of awareness. Simply bring the attention to it and allow it to fill the whole sphere of your awareness.

The Two Dimensions of Samādhi
Meditative concentration, samādhi, can be described as ‘a mental object filling the awareness for a period of time’ or ‘the fixing of the mind on a single object’. Thus samādhi is one-pointedness but this singleness of focus can function in two distinct ways. Firstly, we can think of it as ‘the point which excludes’, that is to say, it locks on to a single object and fences out everything else. Thus this first mode is a tight or narrow fixity, like using the spot-focus beam of an adjustable torch. This is the basis of samatha, meaning calmness or tranquillity.

The second mode can best be called ‘the point which includes’, i.e. it is an expansive awareness that makes the whole of the present moment the meditation object. The ‘one point’ is allowed to expand until it encompasses all the patterns of the present experience. Rather like when using the broad-beam mode of that same adjustable torch, all the varied objects of the present are encompassed by the light of awareness, rather than there being a single brightly lit spot. This is the basis of vipassanā, or insight. One of the great blessings of meditation on the inner sound is that it can easily support both these types of samādhi, the point which excludes as well as the point which includes.

Nada as a Support for Tranquility – Samatha
We can make the inner sound a primary object of attention, letting it fill the whole space of what is known. Very consciously, we leave everything else – the feelings in the body, the noises we hear, the thoughts that might arise – remaining on the periphery, at the edges of our scope of interest. Instead we allow the inner sound to completely fill the focus of our attention. For the moment there’s no need to theorize about it or wonder about exactly what it might be, just turn your attention to it. See if you can detect that gentle inner vibration.

Nada as a Support for Insight – Vipassanā
If we focus on the inner sound for a length of time sufficient to bring such a quality of firmness and steadiness, where the mind is resting easily in the present, we can then allow the sound to...
Words on Silence ... (Continued from page 26)

fall into the background. In this way it becomes like a screen on which all other sounds, physical sensations, moods and ideas are projected – like a screen upon which the movie of the rest of the patterns of our experience is displayed. And because of its plainness, its uniformity, it’s a very good screen. It doesn’t interfere with or confuse the other objects that are arising, yet it’s very obviously present. It’s like having a somewhat mottled screen or a distinctive screen against which a movie is projected, so that if you pay attention you are aware there’s a screen on which the light is being played. It reminds you, ‘This is just a movie. This is just a projection. This is not reality.’

We can thus let the sound simply be a presence in the background, and because of that presence it helps to create a reminder. It supports the recollection, ‘Oh, these are just sankhāras – mental formations – arising and ceasing. All formations are unsatisfactory – sabbe sankhāra dukkha. If something is formed, if it’s an “it” if it’s a “thing”, there is a quality of dukkha in its very impermanence, in its very “thingness”. So don’t attach, don’t entangle, don’t identify, don’t take it to be owned or who and what we are. Let go.’

Thus the sound’s presence can support the ease with which every sankhāra – whether it’s a physical sensation, a visual object, a taste or a smell, a mood, a refined state of happiness, or whatever it might be – is seen as empty and ownerless. It helps to sustain an objectivity, an unentangled awareness, an unentangled participation in the present.

There is the flow of feeling, the weight of the body, the feeling of our clothes, the flow of moods, tiredness, doubt, understanding, inspiration, whatever it might be. It helps to sustain a clear objectivity amid patterns of mood and feeling and thought.

It helps to allow the heart to rest in a quality of attentive awareness, being that very knowing awareness that receives the flow of experience – knowing it, letting it go, recognizing its transparency, its emptiness, its insubstantiality.

The inner sound carries on in the background, reminding us that everything is Dhamma, everything is an attribute of nature, coming and going, changing, that’s all. This is a truth we might have intuited for years, but which we forget because of the confusion which comes from attaching to our personality, our memories, our moods and thoughts, discomfort in the body or our appetites. The stress of attaching to the experiences of all our days since birth keeps the attention confused, entranced, bewildered. Nevertheless, we can use the presence of the nada-sound to help break the trance, to end that entanglement, to help us know the flow of feeling and mood for what it is, as patterns of nature, coming and going, changing, doing their thing. They are not who and what we are, and they can never really satisfy or, when seen with insight, disappoint us.

Frequently Asked Questions
Q: I have not seen this practice of listening to the sound of silence mentioned anywhere in the Suttas or in the traditional commentaries. Where does it come from?
A: At first this was a practice that Ven. Ajahn Sumedho thought he had discovered on his own. He had lived for eleven years in the forests of Thailand, where you tend to do most of your formal meditation practice at night. Those nights were always filled with a cacophony of insect noise so, ironically, it was only after he had come to live in London in 1977, that he began to notice the inner sound. It was particularly clear during the middle of the night, in the still, snowy weather of the winter and then one day it became enormously loud, even as he walked down the busy street of Haverstock Hill. It was so strong a presence that he began to experiment with using it as a meditation object, even though he’d never heard of such a thing before, and to his surprise he found it a very useful tool. As he wrote in his Foreword to a recent edition of the book The Law of Attention by Edward Salim Michael: ‘I had discovered this “inner sound” many years before but had never heard or read any reference to this in the Pali Canon. I had developed a meditation practice referring to this background vibration and experienced great benefits in developing mindfulness while letting go of any thoughts. It allowed a perspective of transcendent awareness where one could reflect on the mental states that arise and cease in consciousness.’ He has also spoken often about how the development of this inner listening had a profound effect on his attitude toward his meditation practice. Being newly arrived in a foreign and distinctly non-Buddhist country, and being in a small house in a big and noisy city, he found a strong urge to retreat and get away, back to his beloved forests in Thailand and away from all these crowds of ‘pesky, pestering’ people. But a vividly clear insight eventually dawned that, rather than seeking the physical seclusion of kāyaviveka, he needed to develop the inner seclusion of cittaviveka. Furthermore, he found this newly-discovered practice of inner listening, attending to what he called the sound of silence, ideal for supporting this quality, this approach of finding seclusion within. This insight proved so central to his understanding of how best to work in this new environment that, when they did eventually move out of London, having been given a forest in West Sussex, he named the new monastery ‘Cittaviveka’ – coincidentally resonating with the name of the hamlet, Chithurst, where this new foundation was established.

After he had been using this practice for a few years, exploring its ins and outs and its results for himself, he began to teach it to the fledgling community at Cittaviveka Monastery. He was aware that no reference to such a method was to be found in the Theravada scriptures, but he felt that since it had such beneficial results, why not use it regardless? Ajahn Sumedho
found that, with listening to the sound of silence, if you put these techniques into practice and find that they are a support for establishing mindfulness, isn’t it wiser to put them to use than to neglect them just because they might not be canonical? The spiritual practice of listening to the sound of silence is always directed towards using skilful means that will help bring about liberation and the end of all dissatisfaction, all dukkha, so, if it works, then we should consider it a worthy thing.

Q: Has this kind of inner listening been used in other spiritual traditions? It has been called ‘nada yoga’, so it sounds like at least some other religious groups have discovered it.

A: After Ajahn Sumedho started to teach it, people began to mention to him how they had encountered it before, either through their own experimentation or through other groups that they had meditated with. He slowly began to find out that a rich variety of spiritual traditions had used it over the centuries.

One of his early such discoveries was the book mentioned above, by Edward Salim Michael. The origins of Michael’s insights into nada yoga were mostly his own experience, influenced as well by Buddhist and Hindu yogic practices. A number of years after Ajahn Sumedho encountered ‘The Way of Inner Vigilance’, and had started to incorporate some of the methods contained within it into his own practice and teaching.

He was leading a retreat in California, in 1991, and the venue was a large monastery of the Northern Buddhist Tradition called ‘The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas’. About halfway through the retreat Ajahn Sumedho introduced the practice of listening to the sound of silence. A day or so later the newly-appointed abbot of the monastery, Ven. Heng Ch’i, commented to the Ajahn, ‘You know, I think you have stumbled upon the Shurangama Samādhi.’ Understandably, Ajahn Sumedho was not sure what he was referring to, so the abbot explained.

‘In our Chan Buddhist tradition, the key scripture is the Shurangama Sutra and particularly the meditation teaching found within it. The Sutra describes twenty-five spiritual practices that different Bodhisattvas present to the Buddha as being the way that they themselves were liberated. One of the Buddha praises as the most effective is that of Avalokiteshvara, Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva. It is a meditation based upon hearing. Guan Yin describes the method thus:

“I began with a practice based on the enlightened nature of hearing. First I redirected my hearing inward in order to enter the current of the sages.”

“By the means that I have described, I entered through the gateway of the ear-faculty and perfected the inner illumination of samādhi. My mind that had once been dependent on perceived objects developed self-mastery and ease. By entering the current of the awakened ones and entering samādhi, I became fully awake. This then is the best method.”

The inner sound carries on in the background, reminding us that everything is Dhamma, everything is an attribute of nature, coming and going, changing, that’s all.

As time went by others would come along and describe practices and teachings that employ this same inner sound in a similar way. In recent years the Zen teacher Chozen Bays, of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Oregon, has spoken of how she feels this very sound, and the deep listening to it, are the basis of Hakuin Ekaku’s famous koan: ‘Two hands clap and there is a sound; (but) what is the sound of one hand?’ As she has written:

‘This koan, the Sound of One Hand, has become trivialized in the West, but its actual meaning is very profound. The koan is a question that cannot be answered by our usual method – by thinking. It can only be answered by non-thinking. It asks us to undertake deep listening, to listen as we never have before, to listen not only with our ears but with our entire being, our eyes, our skin, our bones and our heart.’

Thus, unbeknown to Ajahn Sumedho at the time, despite there being no references to such a practice in the Pali suttas or the classic Southern Buddhist commentaries, such as the Visuddhimagga, it had long been a part of Buddhist tradition after all.

The inner sound has also been developed as a spiritual path or reference point in other traditions. It has been said that it goes by the following names in these various scriptures and philosophical works:

- Naad, Akash Bani and Sruti in the Vedas
- Nada and Udgit in the Upanishads
- The Music of the Spheres taught by Pythagoras
- Sraoasha by Zoroaster
- Kalma and Kalam-i-Qadim in the Qur’an
- Naam, Akhand Kirtan and Sacha Shabd in the Guru Granth Sahib

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Words on Silence … (Continued from page 29)

Q: So what actually is it? What causes this sound? Some traditions regard it as a divine presence, but a physiologist might say it’s simply the electrical effect of neural impulses firing within your ears. What is it?

A: As far as the practice I’ve been describing here is concerned, it doesn’t really matter. One person says, ‘It’s the Essence of the Absolute Supreme Being’ another, ‘It’s just your nervous system, buzzing away’; Pythagoras might say, ‘Since the sun, the moon and the planets all produce their own unique hum based on their revolutions, we hear this Music of the Spheres, which is inaudible externally to the human ear,’ and a practitioner of hatha yoga, ‘No, this is the resonance of your vital energy, your prāna, as it is processed through your seven chakras. It’s the audible, felt presence of your psycho-physical energy system.’ ‘It’s the Song of Suchness,’ ‘No! It’s …’ One could go on and on.

The point is not to theorize, making fixed judgements to no great effect, but to use the beneficial qualities of this omnipresent, universal vibration to help us wake up, and to be wise and peaceful.

It’s rather like the breath. You can relate to the breath in a simple Western scientific way, as the lungs drawing necessary energy from oxygen in the atmosphere and expelling the waste carbon dioxide, or you can think of the breath as a cosmic, metaphysical quality – the prāna (which is the Sanskrit word for ‘breath’) of the Universe, moving in inexorable cycles. Irrespective of how you cast its significance – as cosmological or mechanical – you can watch the breath and use it to help you concentrate and be mindful.

Nada yoga is comparable and so that is the attitude I always encourage. Regardless of what it ‘actually’ is (if one can meaningfully use that word here) we can put it to use, and the results of that use are real and very tangible.

In Conclusion

In Buddhist practice you are always considering, ‘Does this work? What are the results of my efforts?’ and, if the results are beneficial, you use that as an encouragement to continue on that tack. If however, your efforts are bearing no fruit, then you need to consider how you are working and what different approaches you might use. It’s always important to recollect that these practices are for YOU. They are there to serve you, rather than for you to be subservient to them. So please take this method of inner listening and see if it works for you. If it does, then it’s the ‘right thing’ – and if it doesn’t, then may you find other ways to reach and to ascend the spiritual Mountain. The rest is silence.

How Things Should Be and The Way It Is … (Continued from page 11)

In fact Ted’s presence in Africa, his wish to help, his work, along with his confusion at the villagers’ attitudes were also attempts at the Four Noble Truths. He saw suffering, and in the only way that he knew how, he went forth to end it. But he hadn’t fully entered dukkha and he had no Path. Yet he got a teaching: he thought that suffering was outside himself and he could fix it, but the villagers had presented him with a Dhamma that blew that paradigm apart. Unable to fit the experience into his customary way of thinking, now he needed the skill and the encouragement to meet and deepen into what had hit him. The monastery’s reception room in comfortable West Sussex is a long way from impoverished rural Africa; but it’s significant that something in him sought out such an occasion – because it was a place for talking to and being heard by others. This is the most available entry to the holistic Cosmos. But more than that, Cittaviveka monastery presents a situation that is based on generosity, morality and renunciation, where deep attention to oneself, to others, and to the Way It Is, is encouraged and cultivated. These frame a door, but then you’ve got to do it. The key has to be turned. Because without wisely attending and opening into what it reveals, the door of suffering isn’t a Noble Truth, it’s just plain miserable and it doesn’t go away.

Ted comes to the monastery regularly now, to work, listen and meditate. As for me: at times – and if my mind was fully-Awakened, it would be all the time – I live in awe of how the peace of the Way It Is emerges out of meeting, purely, what arises. That out of an unsatisfactory and even anguishing existence should flow such strength, grandeur and freedom that will make a human being give all they have – just because it is the right and true thing to do. But the sweet truth is that although sickness and death may be our lot, greed, hatred and delusion and the needless suffering they create don’t have to weigh us down.

Two poems by Wade

Stable

Summer wind in the forest
as sunlight and shade flutter on his face like butterfly wings.
The mendicant Stable as Earth explains the Training,
his voice peaceful as grass,
his hands calm as pebbles on the bed of a cool stream.

Mistakes

Rain taps on the roof of my little cabin like memories –
past loves, mistakes.
Worldly life afforded few chances to recall them,
But such is my luxury now,
such my opportunity to see change and dissatisfaction
ubiquitous as mountain mist,
and let go like streams releasing the rain.

Wade was an anāgārika at Abhayagiri for approximately one year from 2011-12.

Leaving Discontent Behind

A Dhamma reflection by Ajahn Sundarā

Our Need to Want

Compassion is very important in the Buddhist tradition. The first of the Five Precepts to which lay Buddhist practitioners commit themselves is to refrain from harming any living beings. That is a way of expressing compassion – not killing, harming or committing any acts by body, speech or mind that might create suffering for other people. We may think about not harming people in Africa or Afghanistan, our hearts open when we see children on television suffering in a famine-ridden area, or women who are being abused in certain countries, or even in the West – but often we overlook the fact that we ourselves are suffering. We overlook the aching in our own heart, the yearning for profound peace.

We are part of a society that not only breeds discontent but encourages it. You are supposed to be discontent in order to continue being a good consumer. If everyone were suddenly satisfied with what they have, society would go bankrupt, so society doesn’t want you to look at the pain of discontent. Society encourages you to believe there is pleasure in being discontent, pleasure in getting something other than what you have now, whether it is a new bed, a new TV, a new partner, a new house or a new job. It’s endemic. We are told we are okay as long as we keep buying and as long as we keep biting on the bait of society’s lures, society recognises us as perfectly okay as long as we keep buying and as long as we keep biting on the bait of society’s lures, society recognises us as perfectly functional. It is only when you start looking within your mind, within yourself, or maybe at a time of crisis in your life, that you suddenly feel failed by society – failed by your schools, your parents, your family, your husband or wife. And then that sudden sense of being let down will redirect your attention. Instead of keeping your gaze looking outwards, perhaps you will be forced to look in a different direction. This is what meditation addresses – how to direct our attention properly, skilfully, in the right direction, so that we can really look into that general sense of discontent.

If any of you have achieved a moment of profound peace, a profound sense of wholeness, of being one with things, one with your environment, one with a partner, have you ever investigated that sense of peace? What is it? What is its cause? Well, the cause of peace is the end of wanting in our mind. Then we are at peace.

So a social creature in a materialistic society is far from being a perfectly peaceful creature. In a consumer society, being healthy is synonymous with wanting. This mindset is part of our everyday life, and is reinforced constantly – we rarely find room to question it, to challenge the assumption that wanting is a way to peace, to happiness. There is something in wanting which is very energetic. If you want something, you feel alive – wanting pulls you, it leads you somewhere. You feel driven by desire, and you feel that not wanting anything is a deadened feeling. We are not very good at living with not wanting. Most of our energy comes from acting on wanting: searching, looking, seeking. Very rarely do we find peace through not wanting, and so learning to live without wanting comes as something completely new to us.

Learning to really investigate wanting takes us into a completely new realm of values. But unless there is a connection with that new realm, that more profound Dhamma, unless there is insight into the mind, you will need to want in order to feel alive. We often feel unfulfilled at some level, whether in our work, our family, our relationships, our profession or ourselves, and the conditioned world is kept alive by this unfulfilled state. How do we cope with that feeling of being unfulfilled? We may try to cope by searching for something to fill the gap, the hole, the abyss in front of us and live our lives without truly investigating who is wanting, who is creating this constant wanting experience.

A Still Lake

The feeling of discontent is not a bad thing. It is not unhealthy. Discontent is a symptom of your heart’s yearning for freedom.

When you feel discontent, instead of saying, ‘Oh my god, this is terrible!’ simply realize that at that moment you are aware of your limitations. Discontent is a sign that you have come up against the wall of your conditioned world, and that something in you does not want to go beyond that wall. And so you experience the shadow of discontent. But you have a choice; you can thicken the wall (or create another wall), or you can let go – and by letting go you diminish the wall. The more we let go, the more we are hacking away at that hard ‘self’ with which we have to live. And letting go in this context is not just a synonym for freedom and bliss, it’s a very practical thing. Whenever you let go you are freeing yourself.

The Buddha did not say we should not have any desire. He recognized that we live with that restless energy of wanting all the time, and we do not know how to satisfy it. So out of compassion he gave us a teaching that allows us to investigate our realm of reality. The Buddha taught a path of investigation, but we cannot really use the ability to investigate the realm of our mind and body very thoroughly unless we have already cultivated certain amount of peace, a certain amount of ease. The mind is often compared to a pond or a lake. If the lake is constantly stirred up, constantly agitated by the elements, it is difficult to see very deeply into the water. You can only look down to the bottom of the lake when it is quiet and still. Like a lake, the mind too can be agitated or still.

One of the conditions for being able to investigate is to be able to sit still. This is the first step in meditation – learning to quiet down. Unless you do this you will always be in an agitated state, unable to see what’s what. You won’t be able to see truly how you are feeling, your habits, how you are affected by (Continued on page 31)
things or how you affect other people, until you have a certain amount of inner stillness.

To begin meditation, you calm the mind down by just focusing, bringing your attention to an object which is calming. You can meditate on something very impersonal like a candle flame – just focus your attention, you don’t need to concentrate heavily on the flame. Or you can focus your attention on the breath. You don’t need to focus heavily on it, just feel the rhythm of your breathing. Watching the breath doesn’t cost a lot of money. It’s very cheap and always available, so you have no excuse for not learning how to calm your mind down!

Remember, there is no clarity of mind as long as there is agitation and turbulence. As long as you have a turbulent mind, you will never see anything clearly; you will never be able to come to the point of deeper insight where the mind is truly transformed for good. This is not just an idea or something you learn from a book – the point of insight is to know beyond doubt what is truly skilful and unskilful. That does not mean you will always be successful in calming your mind. It does not mean that habits will never take over and push you back into the same old rut. But we always have the Buddha’s teaching to help us get out of the rut. And eventually, as you get better at seeing deeply and clearly, you won’t need physical skilfulness or special conditions; any situation will be fine. In the middle of the most outrageous situation you will be able to find a stillness, a still point, the eye of the storm.

Sitting at the Beginner’s Feet
When we first started practising, perhaps we were arrogant and conceited. We might have thought we needed an ultimate teaching rather than a simple practice. We thought, ‘Simple practice is for beginners, not me!’ But I have been practising for many years and I am very glad to still consider myself a beginner, sitting at the feet of the don’t know mind. This is why continuing to practise is so important. We tend to think, ‘Oh, I don’t need practice. I’ve done this before. I’ve been doing this for ten years.’ Well, that may be true, but what have you learned from it? Are you more at peace? Is your heart more content? Are you still angry, frightened or greedy? Do you still lust for things? Are you still jealous or envious? Perhaps there is still a little more work to do. Perhaps you have not finished, are not at the end of the path.

No matter how long you may have been practising, remember that the Buddha encouraged his disciples to follow certain ethical guidelines. They are called the Five Precepts, and as I began by saying, at the heart of these precepts is compassion – not harming yourself, your body or mind, and not harming others – harmlessness. So if you find that it’s really difficult not to kill, steal, misbehave sexually, lie or take drugs and intoxicants, if you can’t accept those guidelines, at least you can reflect on how you can be compassionate. Are you compassionate right now? Are you respectful of this person? Are you respectful of yourself? Are you being kind to yourself? When you say something, does it hurt you or other people? You can investigate in this way by thinking, by wisely reflecting. The Pali term for wise reflection is yoniso manasikāra. Whatever painful mental state we may be experiencing, whether it is greed, anger, restlessness or worry, is it the result of the absence of yoniso manasikāra? If you are reflecting wisely, any painful mental state can be seen as it truly is through the lens of wise reflection and wisdom.

You can investigate the six senses very easily in your everyday life. Just look at something and notice your reaction to it – wanting, not wanting, pleasure, pain. Does it bring up tension, anger, frustration? The door to this wide field of investigation and discovery is wide open, and it leads to a wonderful path of discovery. We look at a flower or a person and see how we are affected – mindfully, in a space of stillness. The Buddha doesn’t say that when you look at something you should feel good, or that if you feel bad you are not really practising well. He doesn’t say you should understand everything at once, or that you should have full clarity straightaway or that you should have no desire whatsoever. His teaching is not critical or judgemental. He just says you should watch, observe and see how you are affected.

You are in the driver’s seat. You are fully responsible for yourself; no one else is. Sometimes we may feel intimidated by other people. We want to look good, don’t we? But the goal of practice is not to look good. The goal of practice is to understand what is good and what isn’t. We may have to look really silly in order to understand silliness. If you look greedy, don’t be frightened by your greedy mind. You don’t have to become anything in order to investigate this mind. You can just use what you already have.

All of us, even monastics, are constantly working with strong desire energy and habits. There is a roaring tiger inside each of us. Don’t think monastics are just sitting peacefully on a cushion in a blissed out state. No, we are dealing with the tiger all day and night, the tiger that is always saying ‘No, no, this...

(Continued on page 32)
is not good enough, I need more, I need more, I need more!’ But in our practice we learn to befriend the tiger.

Being Yourself
So you can investigate the Five Precepts in your everyday life. They are not something imposed on you to try to straighten you out or turn you into a good person whom everyone likes. They are a way of investigation. Ask yourself whether you are contented or happy when you break the precepts. What was the result of breaking them? How does it feel to take things that are not given to you, to steal other people’s belongings? Remember that stealing goes beyond taking things. Plenty of stealing goes on at home; for example, going into other people’s rooms and rummaging in their private possessions. How does it feel? Does it make you feel good and at peace with yourself? When you take drugs to annihilate yourself because you can’t bear the reality of life any more, does that feel good? How does it feel when you can’t cope with being yourself, when you can’t accept yourself as I am, when you can’t conjure up enough compassion to be with this totally unsatisfactory being that is yourself? I’m sure it isn’t an uncommon experience to constantly see yourself as unsatisfactory. The unawakened life breeds discontent; unawakened living is a factory of discontent. As an unawakened person, you feel a constant insistence that you need something different, and you do need something different – you need to awaken.

So we should consider ourselves very lucky, very fortunate to have realized that the Dhamma is necessary. We are lucky that we have awakened to the possibility of change and transformation, and the possibility of being fully alive with ourselves. Isn’t it wonderful that you don’t need to be different? You can come to a place of peace and aliveness, transformation and love, compassion, confidence and trust by just being with yourself. Isn’t it wonderful to realize that you don’t need to be somebody else? You are the perfect material for your field of investigation.

But arousing the energy for enlightenment is another story. It’s not easy to be awake. I encourage you to see your practice as a very alive thing, not just becoming deadened on the cushion. Sometimes we have a tendency to want to shut everything down, but that’s not necessary. If I hear someone in the room or there is a little background noise, it doesn’t bother me, just as my breath and body don’t bother me. So don’t be so stupid as to think that to really investigate desire you have to stop desire, to really investigate life you have to stop life, or you have to stop being who you are to start being who you are.

So may you be compassionate to yourselves and others. And may you also have compassion for all the little monsters who are totally uncompromising and completely bent on making you miserable. Have lots of compassion for those creatures, because they are just blind. If they knew any better they would be much more keen to make you happy – but sometimes they might make you happy anyway, so watch out for them.

Glossary – Some of the Pali and foreign terms used in this issue of the Forest Sangha Newsletter
Please note: Below are brief descriptions of how these words are being used in this issue of the FSN; they are not full definitions.

Ajahn (Thai): senior monk or nun; literally ‘teacher’. Used for those with ten vassas or more, regardless of their role in the community.
akkhātāro: a meditation practice in which one maintains one’s attention and mindfulness on the sensations of breathing.
anagārika: male or female postulant in the preliminary novitiate stage.
anattā: not-self, ownerless.
anicca: inconstant; unsteady; impermanent.
appaṃmāda: heedfulness; diligence; zeal.
arahant: a ‘worthy one’ or ‘pure one’; a person whose mind is free of defilements and who is thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.
bhikkhu: a Buddhist monk.
Buddha: Awakened One; the perfectly enlightened historical teacher of the Dhamma.
dāna: giving, liberality; offering, alms. Specifically, giving of any of the four requisites to the monastic order. More generally, the inclination to give, without expecting any form of repayment from the recipient.
Dhamma: the Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
dhammas: phenomenon in and of itself, mental quality.
Dhammapada: a collection of sayings of the Buddha in verse form and one of the most widely read and best known Buddhist scriptures.
ekāyana magga: a unified path; a direct path.
kuti: a hut used for meditation and/or as a dwelling.
Luang Por (Thai): a title of affectionate respect (lit. ‘Venerable Father’).
pabbajjā: ‘Going forth (from home to the homeless life)’; ordination as a sāmanera (sāmaneri), or novice monk (nun).
pūjā: devotional observances such as chanting and offering incense.
samana: religious seeker or wanderer.
siladhāra: a Buddhist nun from the community of Luang Por Sumedho.
sutta (Sanskrit: sutra): literally, ‘thread’; a discourse or sermon by the Buddha or his contemporary disciples. After the Buddha’s death the suttas were passed down in the Pali language according to a well-established oral tradition, and were finally committed to written form in Sri Lanka around 100 BCE. More than 10,000 suttas are collected in the Sutta Pitaka, one of the principal bodies of scriptural literature in Theravāda Buddhism.
Tan (Thai): a common title of respect.
tudong (Thai): travelling from place to place, most commonly seeking quietude and staying in the wilderness.
upsampadā: acceptance; full ordination as a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni.
vedanā: feeling: pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain.
vihāra: a monastic dwelling.
### Lunar Calendar 2013

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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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
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1. Māgha Pūjā  
2. Vesāka Pūjā  
3. Āsālha Pūjā  
4. Pavāranā Day

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### For Friends and Supporters of Amaravati in Thailand

We realize that there are many people in Thailand who are both familiar with Amaravati Monastery and who would like to support it. We also realize that the process of trying to send funds from one country to another can be complicated, time-consuming and sometimes expensive.

A group of supporters in Thailand has therefore set up a bank account for Amaravati Monastery in Bangkok so that donations can easily be made there and then, periodically, forwarded to the Amaravati account here in the UK.

This account is with the Bangkok Bank and it is being administered by Khun Anintita Posakrisna, a good friend of this community. The account number is 179-4-70535-8, account name is Amaro Bhikkhu, Banchak Branch.

This account has been established for the convenience of those people in Thailand who wish to make donations to support Amaravati. We hope that this will accordingly bring the joy that comes from giving to those who wish to make a donation, while also helping to meet the many expenses of running Amaravati Monastery. If you would like any more information please contact Khun Anintita Posakrisna or M.L. Pakamal Kasemsri, Siamsaamtri School, Telephone numbers 02-311-0134 and 02-331-6258-60.

ข่าวถึงญาติโยมในประเทศไทย

เนื่องด้วย ทางวัดตระหนักดีว่า ญาติโยมทางประเทศไทยจำนวนมากที่คุ้นเคยรู้จักวัดอมร์ แต่เพราะการส่งเงินจากประเทศไทยไปยังอังกฤษที่เป็นต้นทุนในการส่งเงินมาก ทำให้การสนับสนุนทางวัดบางอย่างนั้นสามารถไม่ทันท่วงที อาจจะทำให้ญาติโยมที่รู้จักกับทุกคนในประเทศไทยที่ต้องการสนับสนุนจะสะดวกต่อการบริจาคนั้น

ทางวัดจึงกำหนดเงินฝากให้กับธนาคารกรุงเทพฯ สาขาบางจาก เลขที่บัญชี 179-4-70535-8 ซึ่งบัญชีใดก็ได้ เชื่อมโยงกับบัญชีเงินฝากของวัดอมร์ได้กระฉูดในประเทศที่ประเทศอังกฤษเป็นระยะๆ

ทางวัดเปิดบัญชีเงินฝากให้กับธนาคารกรุงเทพฯ สาขาบางจาก เลขที่บัญชี 179-4-70535-8 ซึ่งบัญชีใดก็ได้ เชื่อมโยงกับบัญชีเงินฝากของวัดอมร์ได้กระฉูดในประเทศที่ประเทศอังกฤษเป็นระยะๆ

บัญชีที่เปิดขึ้นนี้เพื่ออำนวยความสะดวกให้กับญาติโยมในประเทศไทยที่ประสงค์จะบริจาคเงินให้กับวัดอมร์ได้กระฉูดในประเทศที่ประเทศอังกฤษเป็นระยะๆ

หากต้องการสมัครมีหน้าที่จะต้องได้รับการสนับสนุนทางวัดอมร์ให้ความช่วยเหลือจึงจะได้รับการสนับสนุนทางวัดอมร์ได้กระฉูดในประเทศที่ประเทศอังกฤษเป็นระยะๆ

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To contact Khun Anintita Posakrisna or M.L. Pakamal Kasemsri, please call 02-311-0134 and 02-331-6258-60.
**AMARAVATI RETREAT CENTRE**

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](http://www.amaravati.org) (Retreat Centre), email retreats at amaravati dot org or ring (01442) 843239

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<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Bodhipalā</td>
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<td>R5 12–21 July</td>
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‘Just One More!’: Dependent Origination and the Cycles of Addiction.

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<tr>
<td>R12 18–20 Oct.</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Brother Nicholas &amp; Buddhist/Christian Amaravati monastic teacher (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R13 1–5 Nov.</td>
<td>5 Days</td>
<td>Luang Por Pasanno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R14 22 Nov.–1 Dec.</td>
<td>10 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Mettā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R15 13–15 Dec.</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>Ajahn Dhammanando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R16 27 Dec.–1 Jan.</td>
<td>6 Days</td>
<td>Ajahn Nyānarato</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.
† Places on this retreat will be allocated by lottery at the beginning of January 2013. To be included in the lottery, your booking form must reach us by the end of December. Any booking forms received after that will be added to the waiting list.

**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. 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 Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA)**
Retreats and Days of Practice (led by an experienced layperson). For bookings and information please visit [www.buddhacommunity.org](http://www.buddhacommunity.org).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Monastic Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1 12 Jan.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 9 Feb.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3 9 March</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4 12–14 April</td>
<td>Weekend Retreat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5 25 May</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6 8 June</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7 5–9 July</td>
<td>5-day Retreat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8 14 Sept.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9 4–6 Oct.</td>
<td>Weekend Retreat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R10 9 Nov.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11 7 Dec.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></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>Month</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Monastic Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1 15 Sept.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 10 March</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3 9 June</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4 9–11 Aug.</td>
<td>Weekend Retreat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5 15 Sept.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6 8 Dec.</td>
<td>Day of Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Family Events**
For bookings and information please visit [www.family.amaravati.org](http://www.family.amaravati.org) or contact familyevents at amaravati dot org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Monastic Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1 3–6 May</td>
<td>Rainbows Weekend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 28–30 June</td>
<td>Family Camp Weekend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3 17–25 Aug.</td>
<td>Family Camp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5 15–17 Nov.</td>
<td>Young Persons’ Weekend</td>
<td>(Age 13–18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

➢ For new families.
¬ For families who have attended a family event before.

**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](http://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 many of the monasteries. The postal address and contact details for each monastery can be found on the back page.

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

Books and audio: www.forestsanghapublications.org
Visit www.forestsanghapublications.org for free distribution books and audio from the monastic communities of Ajahn Chah.

Amaravati
Announcements can be found on the website, www.amaravati.org. Amaravati has its own quarterly bulletin, called Looking Ahead (also available on the website). To receive this by email or by post, write to the monastery or email malan231 at aol dot com.

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

Cittaviveka (Chithurst)
For an email containing Cittaviveka’s seasonal newsletter, write to the monastery or go to the website www.cittaviveka.org where you can subscribe on the webpage.

Hartridge (Devon)
See the Announcements page on their website: www.hartridge monastery.org. Hartridge periodically produces a newsletter: contact the monastery to sign up to receive it.

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

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

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

Abhayagiri (USA)
Updated news and announcements can be found on Abhayagiri’s website, www.abhayagiri.org, where you can also read or download back issues of their newsletter Fearless Mountain (which is no longer being published).

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

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email: malan231 at aol dot com

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Hemel Hempstead – Bodhinyana Group:
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Kendal – Buddhist Group of Kendal (bgkt at etherway dot net):
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Ann Booth
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Tim (01622) 726414

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