



# FOREST SANGHA

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## The Dhamma: Naturally Delightful, Additive-free

*The following is an excerpt from a talk given by Ajahn Amaro during a retreat he led at Amaravati in June of 1988.*

Practising meditation is very much a way of learning, of understanding the ways of nature. One of the meanings of the word Dhamma is 'nature' - just the way things are - the nature of things. We can consider why it is, particularly on a day like today when the sun is warm and bright, why it is that the trees, the singing of the birds, the beautiful clouds, why do they delight us? Why is that something that pleases us? The waving of the trees in the wind, the movement of the clouds across the sky - why is this something that is lovely to us?

The natural beauty of the world is something which pleases us because it gives an echo of Dhamma, of the true nature of things, of the sense of balance and form, of fruitfulness, of the harmony which lies at the very heart of our lives. These qualities in the physical world help to remind us, or lead us inwards to touch that within us which appreciates the beautiful, which loves the harmonious.

And the opening of the mind to Dhamma, to truth, is learning to recognise the place of all our experience in the whole pattern of nature, so that we appreciate more and more from the depths of being that this is the way things are - this is life working itself out.

One of the qualities of the Dhamma, of the truth, is that it's attractive. It draws our attention to it, it draws all things to it. And it is this quality of turning towards Dhamma, turning towards truth, that we are using this work of meditation to cultivate. Now the enlightenment of the mind is in itself a natural process, it is not something that has to be introduced from outside. It's the discovery of the mind's own nature, and this discovery works according to natural laws. The process of this awakening, of this enlightenment, is something that first of all is founded on our conduct, on action and speech, so that once we begin to live in a restrained and modest way, careful of what we say and do, and respectful of the effect we have on other people, this then leaves the mind free from any kind of self-criticism, free from remorse, free from negativity. We don't have to keep remembering all of the foolish things that we've said and done.

The natural result when there is enjoyment of the present moment is that we tend to stop looking elsewhere for our enjoyment, so that the mind is more rested.

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The result of this restraint is a sense of contentment, a sense of ease in life - what is called joy, a pleasantness, a warmth of heart. And this develops as time goes by; as we further our efforts this becomes more of a sense of real enjoyment - a sense of delight, of enthusiasm for life. A lot of our negativity and depression comes from living in very self-centred, self-concerned, self-important ways, and as that is laid aside depression tends to lift. Self-respect arises. Even the very comfort of the body, the health of the body, is affected by our ease of mind, our positivity.

The natural result when there is enjoyment of the present moment is that we tend to stop looking elsewhere for our enjoyment, so that the mind is more rested. It will not rush off into the past and the future. It doesn't seek. So this means that the development of samadhi (or concentration) comes much more easily. The mind will naturally rest, and settle upon an object that it's directed to. Now the quality of samadhi doesn't have to be upon a single fixed point. It also means the concentration upon the moment, upon the whole field of experience. When the mind is resting easily with the whole experience of the moment, then intelligence naturally come into play - the wisdom, the intuition of the mind has a bit of room to operate. It begins to discover the patterns that are at work, how things are shifting and changing, what is arising from what, what is affecting what.

The understanding of the patterns of life that are at work naturally leads to a sense of 'disenchantment'. There's no longer the tendency to grasp on to life, or to push things away. When you see the nature of things, when there's an openness to the way things are, then there's a direct insight into change. You notice that every quality which you experience has the nature of beginning and ending, it comes and it goes. Whether it's part of your mind, or whether it's inside you, or outside you, whether it's mental or physical - you see that everything is changing and that there's no sense of ownership, no sense of possession of any kind of quality, any memory, or feeling or idea in the mind. This is a direct perception, a knowing that: 'Well, that's not me, that's not mine, that's not what I am.'

And the assumptions that you've made about yourself as being a particular kind of person - 'I am an English person, I am so many years old, I am like this. I am an introvert, I am a happy person, I'm a hungry person. I'm hot, I'm cold' - there's a very conscious knowledge that these are only half-truths only relatively true. This is not ultimately who and what we are. There's a sense of purity and a sense of stillness - a distance from the patterns of experience arising in the mind.

This is the relinquishment, the disentanglement from the world of senses, of eyes and ears, nose and tongue, body and mind. It is important to understand, however, that this is not an act of rejection. It's not pushing away, it's not a denial of feelings of beauty in the world, but it's the recognition of them as being part of the conditioned world, imperfect, and not an absolute abiding place. There's no solidity, no real permanence or security that can be found there. As this practice is developed, the heart finds its freedom.

Who scattered these leaves  
in thickly trodden piles  
that, spreading carpet-like,  
lull the crispy crack of  
winter's cold  
approach?

Who scattered these leaves  
with clear, grand gestures,  
that, so generally falling,  
ochre the sullen mud of our  
woodland paths?

It's very helpful to understand that this pattern is something which is within our ability to put into action in our lives in order to be enlightened. It's simply a matter of learning to develop this natural process. It is also important to recognise that to be enlightened doesn't mean to say that the mind is completely empty of any kind of activity - empty of emotion, empty of feeling or perception - that there's no longer a fraction of aversion, no longer love or hate, that the mind becomes a bland empty space where nothing happens. On the contrary, the practice of the Buddha's Way is simply understanding and knowing things as they are. All the feelings, thoughts, doubts, worries that arise in our minds - there's a direct knowing and appreciation of their nature.

Oh who was it  
who scattered these  
precious leaves  
that, with quiet radiance,  
mirror the softening glow of  
our  
golden sun?

*Sister Satima*

'This is not me. This is not mine. This is not what I am. This is not something which can truly trouble or invade the mind, nor is this something to try and hold on to.' Because no matter how beautiful or dear it might be to us, if we try to hold onto an emotion or a memory, a feeling, we can only grasp it for so long ...and then it changes.

Now if you are mindful, if you are awake to the mind in a state of say, confusion, if there's just that acknowledgement, the knowing that, 'Here is confusion, here is the feeling of agitation in the mind,' then that is an enlightened moment. This is important to appreciate: that even though there might be a lot of feeling or activity in the mind, as long as there is awareness present, then there is direct knowing and appreciation of that mental state, no matter how black and confused, or bright and delightful it might be. It's like having the Buddha present. If the Buddha is there - the One Who is Awake - if the knowing is there, then you're safe, no matter how much confusion and difficulty there is.

Our practice is the development of this understanding; that to be enlightened is not to try to exclude every thought and feeling from the mind, or to only think positively, never have any kind of violent or chaotic or vulgar thoughts. But it's simply to be awake to the way things actually are, to the pattern of things as we experience them.

Reflecting upon the changes through the day, you can see how sometimes there are feelings of ease and happiness. Sometimes there are feelings of discomfort. And that it's by adding to it all that the trouble begins. So what I have been encouraging today is the learning of how not to make additions, not to add on to the ordinary nature of life.

To encourage this attitude, the quality that is most helpful for us to develop is that of kindness, benevolence - and this is a very powerful force. It is something which has a tremendous healing capacity for the mind. But it's also something that it's very easy to lose track of. Our minds easily slip into criticism and judgement, and the subtle negatives of what we like, what we don't like, and our tendency to pick and choose amongst our experiences. So what helps, in many ways, with meditation practice is to ground our minds in the attitude of benevolence, of well-wishing towards all our experience.

I remember, not that long ago, I had been developing a meditation practice upon the heart; just focussing the mind in the area of the heart and trying to develop the attitude of kindness, well-being, well-wishing in a very specific way; to make a point of generating that sort of attitude. I was finding this very helpful and it was working very well. But then I noticed that there were still some things in my character, the way my mind worked, that I was tending to push aside, saying: 'Look, don't bother me now, I'm trying to be benevolent. Just get out of my way. Can't

you see I'm meditating?' And these were subtle attitudes - feelings of insecurity and childish, complaining, moaning, selfish irritations going on in the mind. Just little nagging complaints about this and that; wanting to be patted on the head, wanting people to say they loved me and to give me those little affirmations that jolly up your day and make you feel good.

I could see these little moans going on in the mind - wanting to be pampered, supported and have every thing affirming me. And then complaints about other people - just on-going criticism of various people in the community that you would habitually have as a scapegoat in your mind. I would see these petty and childish negativities swirling around, and I could see that there was a tendency to brush them aside.

I remember talking to Ajahn Sumedho one day and saying: 'I can manage a whole-hearted kindness towards people - but as far as the petty, childish, mental activities go, I can manage a tolerance but I can't really get the love quality going.' To which he replied: 'Well that's exactly what you have to put your heart into! That's what matters most of all. The very things you tend to dislike about yourself, you have to consciously learn to welcome them - to generate the heart of kindness for them.'

So I thought: 'Well , O.K. I'll have to do something about this.' For the next few days I made a very definite point, as firmly as I could in my mind, that as soon as I noticed any one of these annoying qualities of mind that I tended to criticize, instead of pushing it away, I would consciously welcome it and appreciate it. So I had this funny little tune going for a while where, as soon as I noticed, say, a feeling of conceit I'd say: 'Oh, welcome. Hello. Conceit, yes please, come in. Sit down. Make yourself at home - yes, yes. Now don't go away. Don't leave. No, no, no, no. Please stick around. You're most welcome to stay as long as you want. Have a cup of tea.' There were these absurd dialogues going on, but I found it very helpful because it made it possible to be clearly conscious of, and to pinpoint, that which we habitually reject, push away - the ugly qualities of our character that we don't like, that we don't want to be. If you're a Buddhist you don't want to be arrogant and conceited, you don't want to be selfish or irritable, or greedy or lustful - you don't want to have these qualities around in the mind. And I found this strange alchemy occurring whereby, as soon as there was this attitude of direct welcoming and fondness, a real readiness to accept those feelings, then there was a conscious appreciation that there never had been any real danger from them. Those weren't actually me at all, anyway.

As long as there was a rejection, a pushing away, I realized that the negativity, the pushing away was implying, 'Here is something that is really able to affect my mind. This is something that can poison my mind. This is something which is me, which is my character, a frame of mind which is corrupting me and which I don't want to have around.'

But as soon as there was that open-heartedness, that welcoming, then there was a recognition that these were qualities which did not touch the mind, which couldn't affect the true nature of the mind. They cannot reach it, they cannot touch it. They're not of the same dimension. They're not of the same order. So there was a direct knowledge that no amount of ugliness or coarseness, of any quality, could ultimately poison or disturb the mind.

This is something that you see portrayed in Buddhist scriptures, in the depictions of the night of the Buddha's enlightenment. Here you see the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree surrounded by the hordes of Mara: the daughters of Mara, all decked out, trying to allure the Buddha; the frightening forms of ugly demons with battle-axes mounted on terrible war-elephants; and then the last of the things which Mara sent to test the Buddha, an image of his old father - King Suddhodana - with tears running down his cheeks, begging the Buddha to come back and take over the kingdom. 'You would have made such a good king, son. Such a fine lad, so bright, so strong, intelligent. You would have done such a good job, I don't know

what I'm going to do. I haven't got any other children. The kingdom will just fall apart.'

The Buddha is not fooled by any of these forces. His response is simply: 'I know you, Mara.' And the hordes of Mara are always at a distance. They can't reach the Buddha. They can't touch him. They cannot enter his zone. And he's just sitting there calm, unintimidated, bright. This symbolises the mind's own true nature - when there is that awakenedness, that full appreciation and openness to the way things are, then nothing, nothing whatsoever, nothing from the mortal world can reach in and touch the mind which knows - that which knows, the Buddha mind, the Buddha quality of your own mind.



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## Living Vinaya

*During the Vassa or Rains Retreat, it is customary for the monks and nuns to have instruction in the Vinaya - the training that the Buddha laid down for his ordained disciples. Training in bodily action and speech is an important aspect of the Buddha-Way, so much so that in Theravada the teaching of the Buddha is typically referred to as 'Dhamma-Vinaya' (rather than simply 'Dhamma'). Understanding the themes and attitudes of the Vinaya is therefore certainly relevant to all followers of the Buddha-Way. Below is an edited extract from one of the talks given by Ajahn Sucitto to the bhikkhus at Amaravati during Vassa 1988.*

We are using this vassa for recollecting the focal point for our community, which is to live in accordance with the Dhamma-Vinaya. The Vinaya needs to be constantly refreshed, because its vitality depends upon it being exercised by a living Sangha of people who practice it. We have these meetings in order to consider wisely how to use the frames of reference, the rules, the regulations and the observances in accordance with the spirit and the aims of the Buddha's teachings. Using this training, the Sangha has been able to keep going for two and a half millennia after the Parinibbana. The Vinaya and the Sangha support each other if the teaching is practiced in the right spirit.

Much of the way that we live is not purely defined by the Patimokkha-discipline, the training precepts which we recite. There are a lot of small points in the day-to-day occurrences where clarity is needed. Besides, the Patimokkha-precepts often relate to particular situations that do not happen in this time, so a lot of the training in Dhamma-Vinaya is to understand how one can reflect on these training-rules. We can also refer to the accounts in the books of the Vinaya and the commentaries to see what are the standards which form the basis of the training rules.

The Buddha said in the Mahaparinibbana-Sutta that the Dhamma-Vinaya would be the guide after his decease, and the interpretation of Dhamma-Vinaya should be by reference to four authorities: the authority of the Buddha's word, the authority of the Sangha, the authority of a Thera-council for the community, or the authority of a single Thera. One should refer to these in times of uncertainty. Also one can use 'Great Standards' (mahapadesa), which say that if something that did not exist at the time of the Buddha resembles something which did, we can regard it in the same way.

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The Lord Buddha himself seemed to take into account the fact that, human nature being what it is and rules what they are - there is no rule that can cover every possible circumstance.

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So there are those things which agree with what the Buddha allowed, although they were not around at the time of the Buddha. Many of our foods or medicines agree with things that were used at the time of the Buddha; so we can use them. The cloth that we use in our robes is not

that which was specified by the Lord Buddha, but agrees with the standards established; so we can use those. Then there are things which were not available but which agree with things which were forbidden. For example, in the Lord Buddha's time people had alcohol, which he forbade; so, quite clearly, narcotics should not be used. These are fairly obvious and easy examples, but many are not quite so easy. So we have to discuss and make decisions as to what things are allowable and what things are not.

In considering matters of our discipline in this day and age it's good to recollect the Lord Buddha's reasons for establishing the Patimokkha at all. He gave ten reasons:

- for the excellence of the Sangha;
- for the well-being of the Sangha;
- for the control of the ill-controlled bhikkhus;
- for the comfort of well-behaved bhikkhus;
- for the restraint of the asavas (the biases, the fundamental hindrances in this present life);
- for protection against the asavas in the future;
- to give confidence to those of little faith;
- to allow the firm establishment of those who have faith;
- to establish the true Dhamma;
- to support the Vinaya.

Notice that they allow a Sangha to be equipped to live long; and they aim to support the faith of newcomers and give faith to those who have not yet had faith in the Buddha-Dhamma. So when lay people come into contact with a well-trained Sangha, they see people who are trying to live a life of composure, clarity, and benevolence; who are trying to live as manifestations of Dhamma. This gives them confidence.

Then we also use these training rules so that the true Dhamma and the Vinaya itself, the way out of delusion, is constantly kept strong. For example, using the Patimokkha-training rules and the obligations at this time gives us a clear role in our society. It would be quite easy, I think, for us - just acting with good intentions - to handle money, to take up jobs or work, to involve ourselves in social causes, without feeling that what we were doing was grossly wrong. But it's not what we are about. Something, say, as simple as not being able to handle or store one's own food (which doesn't seem to be a moral issue), has a far-reaching effect. If that training was abandoned we'd no longer be dependent on alms, we'd no longer have to go out, we'd no longer need to relate to lay-people. This is one of the great differences between Buddhist and Christian monasticism, where one may become more and more isolated from lay-people (as a hermit), or not much different from one (as a teacher). The relationship is not so well-defined.

Something else to consider is a question raised by the elder Ananda about the survival of the Order after the Parinibbana. The elder Ananda commented that after the decease of the Niganatha Nataputta - the leader of the Jains - all the Jains

#### Dusk-Light

Looking from this seat the  
Field is calm in fading light.  
A breeze is an anointing hand  
Gently touching as I wait for night.

Day is going, birds no longer sing.  
I wear a robe of quietness just being here  
Beneath a tree whose branches gently bow.  
Here is freedom from all fear.

The scene will be changing, in each  
Moment of life there is death.  
In leaving there is peace with  
The final offered out-breath.

Here where day of going  
Where birds chant no more  
Life may be seen as a journey

began quarrelling and wrangling and arguing amongst each other, with the result that the laity were disgusted and disaffected. Naturally he was concerned whether this would happen after the decease of the Buddha:

'It occurs to me revered Sir, that we should take care that lest after the Lord's passing dispute arises in the Order, dispute for the woe of the manyfolk, for the grief of the manyfolk, for the misfortune of the populace, for the woe and the sorrow of devas and mankind.'

The Buddha pointed out that at that time, of course, everybody would agree on the practice of Dhamma: the four applications of mindfulness, the four right efforts, and so on. But he went on to say:

'That dispute which concerns either the mode of living or the obligations is a trifle, Ananda. But , Ananda, if there should arise in the order a dispute either concerning the Way or concerning the course, this dispute would be for the woe of the manyfolk, the grief of the manyfolk, the misfortune of the populace, the sorrow of the devas and mankind.'

So the Buddha felt that the most important principle was to keep the Way out of suffering and the practice (of eliminating the asavas) firmly in mind. And then he went on to talk about the different ways in which the Sangha can have internal dispute and how this can be settled by what are called the *adhikarana-dhamma*, the 'means of settling disputes and quarrels.'

So the Lord Buddha himself seemed to take into account the fact that, human nature being what it is and rules what they are - there is no rule that can cover every possible circumstance - that there were bound to be certain slight differences of opinion about interpretations, and over what the Buddha actually had said. He took that into account; so such differences of opinion are not a problem, provided that the Sangha would always get together and come to harmonious agreement. He laid down six different causes for disputes:

'A monk is angry and bears ill-will, ....a monk is harsh and unmerciful, ... envious and grudging, ....crafty and deceitful,....of evil desires and wrong view, ....infected with worldliness, is obstinate and stubborn, he lives without deference and respect towards the teacher; he lives without deference and respect towards Dhamma; he lives without deference and respect towards the Order and he does not complete the training.'

These are the six sources of dispute, and they are all based on corruptions in the heart, rather than flaws in the Dhamma-Vinaya.

Then there are various legal questions arising due to a dispute or because a monk has been accused of wrong-doing; or because there is uncertainty over what constitutes an offence; or over what constitutes a monk's proper duties. There are seven rules for working with these, all of which require the presence of the community, the Sangha - which doesn't mean every single monk in the world, but all the Sangha dwelling within what is called the *sima* or 'boundary, the area of one monastery. All of the bhikkhus dwelling within the area where a dispute arose should gather together.

Seeking a peaceful shore.

The breeze came soft and gentle  
Dusk a friend wise and dear.  
This time was a loving kindness  
Where special true light was near.

Just to be still and receive  
What life had offered to me  
In a time like this was to feel  
That a person could truly be free.

And who is sitting here? I asked  
In my mind there was no strife.  
Here in original beauty in  
Dusk-light came newness of life.

**George Coombs**

Firstly, the verdict must be given 'in the presence of', so if there's a dispute about a bhikkhu he himself must be there. Then, a 'verdict of innocence' may be given, which means that someone is recognised of being of such a moral standard that it would be impossible for him to have committed that offence: if someone is an arahant, then just by recognising that, the whole issue can be quashed. Or, a 'verdict of past insanity' may be given, which means that if somebody was mad at the time they would not be held responsible for their actions. Or a verdict may be carried out on his 'acknowledgement of what occurred'; the very presence of the Sangha will often make a person own up to where he was going wrong or to say, 'well, actually I think I was wrong, I am sorry about that' or, 'Yes, that was an offence'. The Sangha reflects the aspiration and the direction of the Lord Buddha's teaching; so in the presence of the Sangha, people will generally do what is most honourable.

There are some issues which can be decided by majority; for example; whether we should build some buildings. And the 'decision for specific depravity', means the Sangha can formally censure a monk who has done particularly foolish or blameworthy things. 'Covering up with grass' is a way of making amends: say, if one monk has fallen out with another monk, and they start arguing. Then the friends of monk A side with him, and the friends of monk B side with him, and then they all start quarrelling. 'Covering up with grass' means that one of the members of the group A would get up, and say to all the bhikkhus of group B, 'Venerable sirs, for whatever offences our party has caused, we want to confess that, we want to acknowledge that.' Then somebody of group B does the same and the whole matter is dropped, rather than getting into mutual recriminations.

Lord Buddha felt that these guidelines would be adequate for sustaining the true practice of the Dhamma-Vinaya even when, from time to time, there might be a dispute over the exact interpretation of the letter of the law. Such legal procedures can only be carried out when people are acting with right intentions, clarity and peacefulness. So the critical factor is the Sangha's aspiration to live in purity, and to interpret the meaning of the rule with wisdom.

Now compassion is a major aspect of that wisdom. The Buddha continues:

'And furthermore, six things are to be remembered: A monk should offer his fellow Brahma-farers a friendly act of body, both in public and in private; he should offer a friendly act of speech, a friendly act of thought.

'And whatever are those lawful acquisitions, lawfully acquired (this means whatever he has received on almsround) if they be even but what is put into his begging-bowl - a monk should be one to enjoy sharing such acquisitions, to enjoy them in common with his virtuous fellow Brahma-farers.

'And whatever are those moral habits that are faultless without flaws, spotless without blemish, freeing, praised by wise men, untarnished, conducive to concentration, a monk should dwell united in moral habits such as these with his fellow Brahma-farers, both in public and in private.

'Whatever view is ariyan, leading onwards, leading him who acts according to it to the complete destruction of anguish - a monk should dwell in such a view as this with his fellow Brahma-farers.

'These are the six things to be remembered, making for affection, making for harmony, which conduce to concord, to lack of contention, to harmony and unity. If you, Ananda, should undertake these six things to be remembered, should practice them, would you, Ananda, see any way speech, subtle or gross, that you could not endure?'

'No, revered sir.'

'Wherefore, Ananda, undertaking these six things to be remembered, practice them; for a long

time it will be for your welfare and happiness.'

This is from the Samagama-Sutta in the Majjhima-Nikaya. The Buddha referred to 'Dhamma-Vinaya' and he also said, according to the Mahaparinibbana-Sutta, 'that the standards should be placed against what was written in the Suttas and the Vinaya'. If everything agreed, then you could be confident that this was what the teaching was.

It seems that after the Buddha's Parinibbana there was a tendency to divide the Dhamma and the Vinaya into separate pitakas - but this was formulated after the Buddha's decease. One can, of course, take Dhamma without Vinaya - 'Just follow the way of the spirit, follow the heart, conventions are just trouble, picking and fiddling around ....We just need to meditate' - that attitude. Or one can take the Vinaya without Dhamma, which produces a legalistic attitude about the training-rules, whereby one can end up using the training without reflecting on it. Sometimes, when one looks at some of the commentaries on the Vinaya, one does feel that they have extended the principle of logic beyond the bounds of what is reasonable.

But Sangha practice is to put Dhamma and Vinaya together. One of the fundamental principles that determines what are called offences or transgressions is the quality of intention. With the most serious offences (parajika), intention is very important: they all entail intention, effort and completion of that act. This word, 'intention', is something to consider and get in touch with. Of course, a mind that's completely full of thought doesn't know intention; intention is a much deeper mainspring of mental volition than just a surface burbling of the chattering mind - and certainly we can have all kinds of foolish thoughts. But to get in touch with intention, to understand Vinaya from that standpoint, you have to practice meditation and understand Dhamma. So Dhamma and Vinaya support and deepen each other. It is this that makes the Buddha's teaching so alive and dependent on the effort of those who practice it.



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## Question Time

*Ajahn Sumedho replies to a question on attachment and self-view.*

Grasping is the problem. If you see grasping and understand that, then you have solved life's problems completely. If you really reflect, it's the grasping of the sensory world that makes it all go wrong. In itself the material world is all right. There's nothing wrong with humanity or the universe. It's the grasping that makes us suffer from it.

The Buddha pointed to this grasping. In the first Noble Truth he said: 'There is suffering.' He stated the problem that we all have: there is this suffering, this dukkha that we all experience. Then the second Noble Truth is that we suffer because of grasping. Then the insight is to let go of things; and then the realization of non-attachment follows. So if there's peacefulness and calm, then you're aware of non-grasping. The sense of 'me' and 'mine' depends on grasping things. When you think back in your life, the memory part is from being able to remember moments of grasping. You can't remember the moments you were not grasping something. So then you're always having to do things to remember. That's why excitement, romance, adventure, all these things are so powerful for us because when we grasp them then we have these memories. We feel alive. Human beings identify with and grasp memory as self.

You feel alive when you're angry and you hate somebody. Indignation makes you feel alive - that you are somebody. Greed makes you feel you're going to get something you want. To want something and get it gives you a sense of being alive. Envy and jealousy: to be somebody who other people are jealous of is important, isn't it? To have a better car than the neighbours or to have a beautiful house, or lovely clothes, or be someone who has status in a community - the grasping of that ....

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You always know when you're attached, because you're suffering.

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You suffer because you're always in this position of being somebody. And then there's always going to be a reaction from somebody else. So if I am a rich and famous person, then the grasping of that perception means that there are going to be a lot of people who want either to challenge me, or take away my wealth, or criticize me. Or people are going to try to delude me, flatter me and make friends with me because they want the things that I have. So that whole form of grasping leads to suffering.

But actually, having status and wealth and a new car and all this - there's nothing intrinsically bad or wrong with that, but it's the grasping of it that will bring the suffering. And conversely, with poverty: grasping the idea that I'm a poor person, I'm low class, I'm worthless - grasping that view is suffering.

At least when you think: 'Well, I'm poor and I'm the lowest, meanest, most unlovable person

in the society' - at least nobody's going to envy you for that. But it's still a position that one's going to suffer from attachment. When the attachment is seen through, then it doesn't matter. What your status is, whether you're at the top or the bottom, or in the middle - these are not the important issues of our life or spiritual development. They're not important to us.

The Buddha established the Sangha in a way that avoids all that. If you're from the aristocracy, or if you're from the working class or whatever, when you come into the Sangha it's of no importance. You're just Sumedho Bhikkhu, Sobhano Bhikkhu, Sucitto Bhikkhu - you're just bhikkhus, and you don't know whether they were Lord so and so, or Prince of Princess, or any of these things. Such things are of no importance in the holy life. But in worldly life, to have a Ph.D., to be someone who's well-educated, or who comes from a good family: these are highly valued by people in the society.

Or they're criticised. You can be an egalitarian, thinking: 'I hate the aristocracy - Lords, Ladies and Counts and Countesses - it's all rubbish.' But that means that you still think it's something. To call it rubbish means that you actually believe it is something important - because as a condition, it's just what it is, you don't have to call it rubbish. It's nothing bad in itself or wrong to be a Lord or a Lady, or a Count or Prince, but it's the attachment to any view about it that leads to suffering.

With something you really love, then attachments form quite easily. And you always know when you're attached, because you're suffering. One time, I'd become very devoted to Ajahn Chah. I'd become very attached to him, actually. This gave me a lot of happiness, because I hadn't had anyone who I really felt that love for in my life. So it all went to Ajahn Chah, and it was a very inspiring and wonderful feeling for me. But then I noticed that I was suffering a lot, because if anybody criticised Ajahn Chah or implied that there was a better teacher somewhere else, I'd get incredibly angry about it.

And so I'd watch this. At first I believed it. I'd say: 'If you think the other teacher's better than Ajahn Chah, go to that other teacher' - that kind of thing. But then I'd reflect and see that it was not a very nice mental state, and I'd watch the suffering that was coming from that. And then I'd realise the attachment.

Then the tendency was to think, 'I shouldn't be attached.' So I'd say: 'I'm not really attached. Other teachers are just as good as Ajahn Chah. They're all the same ....' But I was still attached; out of idealism I was just pretending not to be attached.

So you still suffer, though you're pretending to be completely tolerant and non-attached. Then you realise the attachment is an emotional one. So you begin to go to the feeling of attachment and really study attachment, rather than just trying to suppress it and say: 'I'm not attached.' You go to that place in yourself and you investigate it. You learn from it; and through that you

#### **Under Beech Wood**

Beneath the pollarded beech grove  
I sit in a perfect crescent of root,  
on a bed of autumn's leaves and  
beech nut husks.

The air is soft to the skin, a gentle  
breeze carries the echoes of bird song.  
It is too hot to walk far in the open.  
I am grateful for luxuriant green shade  
offered by these long branches,  
sideways extensions into space.  
Drinking apple juice from a tin mug,  
there is nowhere to go this aimless  
afternoon.

Resting in the stillness of the forest,  
back to where I came from.

***Sobhano Bhikkhu***

let go of it. Because once you see it, then attachment's gone. The attachment is out of ignorance. You're never attached out of wisdom. So once there's wisdom then there's no attachment.

You can be attached to the idea of not being attached. Krishnamurti, for example, would always emphasise not to be attached to anything. He would say, 'Monks, this is all wrong. Religion, monks, all this is wrong. It's not the way.' Then people listening to that would attach to his view, and they weren't aware of the attachment they had to Krishnamurti's view. So the problem is not the view, but the attachment. A view is a view. You can see if you're attached to a view, for or against it. Then the actual practice is to not being attached to any view, and you are very much investigating what's going on.

With wisdom you're free to be a monk or not to be a monk, but you're not attached to it. You have no opinion. I can see if there's an attachment to being a monk, then I suffer from it, from being a monk. But when there's no attachment, then one feels that it's an offering. One presents this monastic form to others as an offering. It's a gift, it's a beautiful form in itself. It's not me.

It would still be an attachment if I felt, in order to prove I'm not attached to being a monk, I should disrobe. That's still an attachment from the self, isn't it? To prove that I'm not attached, I'll have to disrobe to see what happens to my mind when I'm not a monk. That's attachment. But if you're just with the moment as it is, then being a monk, the form itself, is just a beautiful form, a beautiful convention that one feels is of great use and can be a great offering to the society we're in. Beginning with ignorance, there's this imposition, this going out, out of fear and desire and ignorance. So that is the compounding of the whole process, and then attachment comes from that, and one builds a whole realm of attachment in one's mind.

Now when there is the ending of ignorance, then the world that is created out of ignorance falls away. Then there's what we call Dhamma - the way things are. So then monks and nuns and lay people, and Buddhist conventions and all these things, are what they are. They're dhammas for us, rather than attachment.

The Western mind tends to assume that non-attachment means 'getting rid of something'. For example, a woman said to me once: 'I could never be a Buddhist because I'm attached to my children.' I'd say: 'Well, what do you mean, not be attached to your children? Throw them off a cliff or something to prove you're not attached to them? Or just desert them so that you won't be attached to them?' That's not Buddhism. But the ability to not be attached to your children means that you can love your children. When you're attached to your children, you can't love them any more - because attachment destroys that. Any love you have is destroyed by attachment, because attachment blinds and is painful and is suffering. Whereas love born from wisdom is joyful.



**THIS ISSUE****Editorial:**

Cover: ■ Dhamma: Naturally Delightful, Additive-free; Ajahn Amaro

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■ Question Time; Ajahn Sumedho

■ On The Path; A Tudong Special: varied experiences

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## On The Path page: 1 2

*Several groups of monks and one group of nuns had the opportunity to go wandering 'on tudong' this summer. Although the experience is generally a pleasant one, going tudong also implies a degree of insecurity. It allows the movement of faith - the stepping into the unknown, relinquishing hope or expectation. One of the greatest blessings of the Holy Life is that it forces one to encounter situations where the only choice is to let go in faith. And then this letting go seems to give space for the wonderful to arise. The following reflections are accounts by different monks and nuns of their tudong experience.*

- Sister Viveka was among the nuns who walked west from the Devon Vihara ...
- A poem by Sister Thanissara, inspired by nuns' two-week walk in Devon.
- Ven. Kovido walked with Ven. Attapemo from Amaravati to Chithurst.
- Venerable Nyanaviro writes on his four day walk in Teesdale.
- Venerable Subbato offers this part account of the Devon to Amaravati tudong.
- Venerable Chandapalo reports from Switzerland.

### **Sister Viveka was among the nuns who walked westwards from the Devon Vihara ...**

Our tudong in devon was auspicious from the very first evening when we were blessed by the Devon Vihara, and offered vihara-made candles in bundles of incense and flowers to carry with us. As we arrived at the vihara, a double rainbow was spanning the valley, its incredible colours drawn out of nowhere.

The walk was full of such wonders - rainbows, and exquisitely sweet honeysuckle scents drifting from the hedgerows, the wildflowers dazzling in their beauty and the intricate wildness of the roadside foliage; the streams rolling and tumbling - sometimes seen through rainy days. One becomes more aware of the elements: water, which takes on the characteristics of whatever it contacts; and earth - how one clings to feeling solid and so dislikes feeling tired and shaky as if about to collapse, until you let go into the motion, the movement of the body; and the radiance of a quiet mind which starts to accept all experiences equally - open to the generosity and exhaustion alike, allowing the universe to unroll as it will.

Although we walked through lonely and deserted places - across moors dotted with barrows, over Tors on Dartmoor - yet there was often the sense that many beings were walking with us. And each day we were met by Devon supporters, always with beaming, welcoming smiles and hospitality. It was a great opportunity to open to a sense of faith in the benevolence of the universe towards those who renounce.

It was my experience to be very aware of one's vulnerability as an alms-mendicant - having only what you could carry with you. Long walks planned and no control over food or shelter. So one has to surrender to the body, to walk, to walking, and trust that what you need will appear at the suitable moment.

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There is such a joyful willingness in the lay community  
to support the life of renunciation.

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In the end, food, shelter and medicines were abundant. Cath, who organised the support for the walk, said that everything came together almost on its own - although I would not underestimate the effort which she put forth to encourage that result.

Together with the sense of being profoundly grateful for the care and generosity of our friends - many of whom had not met before - there was also the startling relief in realising that we were welcomed as Sangha. There is such a joyful willingness in the lay community to support the life of renunciation. No matter who you are and how good or bad you think you are, the aspiration and commitment to live under the Vinaya is respected and supported. This Buddha-Dhamma is powerful stuff.



### **A poem by Sister Thanissara, inspired by nuns' two-week walk in Devon.**

#### **Tudong in Devon**

Between hello and goodbye  
that echo in lost valleys,  
we meet in dreams.  
From the mountain peak we try to see  
so that we may know from whence we look.  
On waking this day, and in the silence  
I remember a dream  
of that old and beautiful land  
which they call Devon.

Red earth  
green hedged fields  
and heath lands that roll with the hills.  
Cows and sheep grazing  
small farms  
with dogs barking and howling into the night.  
Beautiful stones underfoot  
each holding some mysterious essence.  
Mud tracks and cow pats,  
wild flowers, dotted like stars  
proclaiming their simple state of being.  
Woods and forests  
whispering through the leaves  
stories of travellers and old history.

Listen carefully.  
Green foliage bursting with life  
and shadows falling at twilight,  
following streams and rivers  
that trickle and course their way to  
the sea  
which seen in the distance  
beckons and calls.  
Walking near, the smell  
--salt, seaweed,  
seagulls that glide so naturally.  
Its might and infinity washing

away  
the limited  
as each wave breaks.

Dartmoor  
pouring rain and biting wind  
majesty and power radiates  
stirring the depths.  
A primitive note struck and a long-forgotten call  
that haunts.  
Stone circles  
tumuli, tors  
ancient dwellings and lost folklore.  
Maybe we lived here years ago.

So  
just so  
just as it is.  
Nature, ordinary, extraordinary  
and beautiful to behold.

In the depths of the dream a mirror is held  
a kaleidoscope of people  
reflecting facets of one's own mind.  
Where's the separation?  
So different  
so similar.  
Each in their shy beauty veiling the light  
with visions and despair  
confusion and insights  
the human plight.  
How strange  
to be nobody  
to be everybody  
- tell me - do you know who we are  
as we dance, move and weave  
our way through space and time?  
Yet  
nothing really happens  
no fixed views or rights and wrongs  
just looking  
and sensing the heart beat of every living  
being  
- their life's song.

Totnes



green capital of the West.  
Curiosity like a trapped bird  
being drawn down many corridors  
to where?  
It's hard to know what freedom really is  
In a world of shadows that people call reality.  
In the silent empty night  
dark alone  
awareness shines bright for a moment  
shifting the shadows and dispelling the dreams.  
The heart fully appreciates  
the triple jewel  
as one who had travelled far would appreciate the long lost love  
of a friend.  
Perhaps that too is just a dream  
a dream ....



### **Ven. Kovido writes on his walk with Ven. Attapemo from Amaravati to Chithurst.**

The actual sensations of walking became the background flow of the stream that kept re-emerging during the walk: the feeling of the pack which seemed to get heavier during the day; the interplay of the heat and the cold - finding out that it is preferable to walk in gentle rain rather than hot sunshine; and the effect that a small change in gradient could make to walking. Then the coolness of the trees and the immense relief of taking off the pack and having a break in the late afternoon. How quickly we cooled down when we stopped walking!

Late in the afternoon, or early in the evening we would approach a village where we planned to spend the night. It is strange how different it is to walk somewhere rather than to drive. Driving, basically, is going from A to B. You may see a few things whizzing by, but the general experience is: leave A, drive, arrive at B. On the other hand, walking is a very gentle, gradual way to approach a village. As one walks in, consciously or sub-consciously one absorbs the surroundings: the type of terrain - woodlands or fields, buildings and footpaths, the farm animals, the type of architecture. Then, feeling something of the history - the age of the place, the church, the duckpond, the village green, the house names. And then, there you are at somebody's house and somehow you are part of the surroundings - not really an intruder. Quietly, gently, walking in.

The door opens and the scene changes and for a while one enters into a different world, like water in a stream coming to a pool, slowing down and curling around for a while. And one undergoes that ritual of getting to know somebody. Having walked helps, because at the end of a day one is tired and thirsty and dirty. So if somebody gives you a cup of tea and a chair to sit down on you are immediately grateful and responsive. Being made helpless by our rules (and also by what we could carry), one cannot get these things for oneself, so a gap is created and during our walk it was generously and regularly filled to the full.

Getting to know somebody and being allowed to come into their space for a while is to get a glimpse of a non-monastic world. What are the values, the ideas which make people do what they do? What do they actually do? And the idea of one's work - not so much the bread-winning stuff although not necessarily separated from that - but the work which is the purpose and the fulfillment of a life, its relationship to the society and environment that one lives in. How does this equate with life as a Buddhist monk? Surprisingly, we found that people who may regularly visit the monastery really know very little about the monks and think we (Ven. Attapemo and myself!) are quite formidable or intimidating. And so, partly through the etiquette and the rules about what we can and can't do as monks, and also through the exchange of ideas and thoughts, we would get a glimpse into each others' worlds.

And in the midst of all this we take tea and refreshments, a bath, a rest and breakfast and

then off we go again. And after about a hundred yards of leaving comes up that feeling of "Oh yes. Remember. This is what it's all about.' That familiar feeling of the weight of the pack on one's back., and the legs stretching out like being back with an old friend. Back walking again, leaving that other world behind, and leaving gently with no traces left behind. And so we'd go on walking, flowing down the stream - stopping for a while, entering another world - and then walking on again.



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## EDITORIAL

### Dhamma is the Centre of the World

It is a commonplace observation to note how unnatural our society's ways are; to a great extent, high-speed electronic machines and rhythms pervade our daily life in the West. To one who investigates the mind it is equally apparent that being connected to energies that ignore the mind's rhythms, needs and limitations brings some unhappy consequences on the individual consciousness. Furthermore, even when we are not actually working in such an environment, the predominant worldly values of achievement and efficiency take their toll on the available space of heart and mind.

Meditation itself is not immune to achievement attitudes, and even in a monastery life can become measured in terms of how much one has accomplished. It's so obvious, and as such accepted as the way things have to be; the world seems to be too vast and powerful for us to change it.

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Rather than trying to get out of the world, or expecting something in it, the way out of suffering is based on a very full appreciation of the moment.

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However, using the teaching of the Buddha, it is always possible to work on suffering by understanding and purifying the connection to the world: relaxing the hope and despair, the need for achievement and any position in or out of the world. Rather than trying to get out of the world, or expecting something in it, the way out of suffering is based on a very full appreciation of the moment; only that will bring the mind out of the spinning realm of time and cause and effect.

A training that emphasizes care for each thing in itself, and awareness of how one affects others, is a great help - and this is the key to the aspect of the teaching that we call the Vinaya. Vinaya is generally understood to mean the monastic discipline, but its principles of frugality, modesty and responsibility form an excellent basis for family life also. This discipline teaches one to be clear about one's motivations and to appreciate other beings and the requisites of life as they are.

In that way, our intentions move away from achieving results in the future - whatever the means - towards purifying the means and the approach to life. It makes it possible to live life from a Dhamma centre, a real human centre, rather than spinning like a lost spirit around the vortex of samsara.

It would be quite splendid irony if the ancient themes of Dhamma-Vinaya proved to be the most progressive means towards the improvement of the quality of life in this over-sophisticated age.

*Ajahn Sucitto*