



# FOREST SANGHA

## newsletter

January 1991

2534

Number 15

### THIS ISSUE

#### Editorial: ■

- Cover:** ■ The Real World; Ajahn Sumedho
- Articles:** ■ Beginners' Minds: From newly-robed bhikkhus
- Guidelines for Cultivation; Master Hsuan Hua
- The Golden State; Amaro Bhikkhu
- Sanghapala: an introduction; Marc Lieberman

**HOME** ■

**BACK ISSUES** ■

## The Real World

*This is adapted from a teaching given by Ajahn Sumedho during the 1988 winter monastic retreat at Amaravati.*

Tonight we will once again reflect on the way life is as a human being. Birth in the human form means there is a feeling of separateness, consciousness works within the limitations of the body, so each one of us has to see things from that particular position. Right now I'm sitting right here, I have to see things from this position. Sister Kalyana is way over there in the corner, and Anagarika Bill is here in front - but no matter how far away or close, there is this sense of division or separation. Consciousness is the discriminative function of the mind, so if we attach to consciousness as our identity, there is always the sense of isolation and separation.

There are romantic views of finding someone to have communion with. There's a longing in all human beings for some kind of communion or sense of oneness, yet that is a totally impossible thing to have on the level of the discriminative mind - which is where most people seek it. If I am this body, this consciousness, then how can I ever be one with anything? Even though momentarily there may be a sense of oneness - through physical union or emotional unity - there is also separation, because that which comes together must separate. This is the inexorable law. If one is attached to an idea of union, unity or communion, and one feels a moment of it, that conditions the sense of isolation; there is always a sense of loss.

So the more we seek communion and oneness in terms of body and consciousness, the more we feel alienated and lonely. Even when there isn't physical or emotional aloneness, we can still feel lonely, because of the existential problem of ignorance - the illusion of separation which is created through identification with consciousness.

One can be sitting in a room full of people and feel totally alone. In fact, I think one of the loneliest experiences of my life was when, at about age 24, I went to New York City to live. I was surrounded by millions of people, yet I felt so lonely. Where did the loneliness come from? It was due to the longing, the attachment to the belief in 'the real world' and the feeling

of not having entered 'the real world' in the same way others had. I didn't realise that everyone had the- same problem, actually. I used to think it was a personal flaw in my character, that somehow I was a misfit and that everyone else fitted in - only to find that most people felt that they were misfits.

---

Meditation isn't an escape from the instinctual world,  
but an opening up to it; it's a way of understanding the  
world, apart from the reactions of indulgence or  
suppression.

---

This sensory world doesn't fit us, really. It's a kind of passage that we take in order to learn a lesson. (Hopefully we will learn it!) We don't fit into these roles - we are not really people; you are not really women; you are not really men. These forms are like costumes, they're temporary things that we have to learn to live with. We have to learn how to accept them and know them. We have to learn from this suffering, this sense of alienation that comes from ignorance.

It probably starts from the moment you're born, from the time you are thrown out into the world. Babies usually cry when they are born - they don't come out laughing. I've never heard of one doing that! You are one with your mother, and then the umbilical cord is cut. That is the end of that relationship and then you are a separate being; that must be very traumatic for every baby. You see so many people longing to get back into that relationship again. We'd like a mother to nurse us and take care of us, protect us, keep us warm and all that. I've seen that myself - wanting to have some nice warm womb to crawl back into, some safe place where I'll be protected and be told, 'I love you dear, forever, no matter what you do, and everything's going to be all right. There's going to be plenty of everything - warmth, food and comfort - forever more.'

If you practise meditation and develop insight into the Dhamma, you can investigate to see the real problem. Is there any real separation, or is it merely an appearance of separation, brought about by attachment (through desire) to the five khandhas\*?

*\*five khandhas: the five components or "heaps of human psycho-physical existence, i.e. form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.*

Consciousness implies desire, because as a result of consciousness there's feeling. There are feelings of attraction, repulsion or neutrality and we tend - until there is enlightenment - to react to feeling with desire. We incline towards beautiful, pleasurable things. We try to get rid of, to run away from, ugly or painful things. And the whole range of neutrality is usually unnoticed - unless you write poetry or do something to be more mindful. Usually we're caught in the more extreme reactions to the attractiveness and repulsiveness of sense experience.

There is culture, refinement and beauty in the sensory realm, and we can appreciate celestial and ethereal planes of mental creativity. However, it is the lower elements which tend to be the easiest things to absorb into: violence, sex, survival, which are the instinctual functions of the animal world. If

you want to turn on masses of people, you have to appeal to that level. We must learn how to touch the earth and accept instinctual nature, the four elements and planetary life as it is. Meditation isn't an escape from the instinctual world, but an opening up to it; it's a way of understanding the world, apart from the reactions of indulgence or suppression.

We are not trying to deny the animal functions or instincts - or reject them, suppress them - or identify with them as 'me' or 'mine'. But we can reflect, we can note, we can accept them for exactly what they are, rather than for what we believe them to be. Then we can appreciate the intelligence and creativity of a human mind too, without becoming attached to it.

This attachment(upadana) is really the crux of the matter. Identification is attachment: 'I am this person, this personality.... I am this body, this is "me". ... I am this way. ... I should be ... I shouldn't be. . . .' And because of "I am' and 'me', there's 'you' - because on this level of consciousness there is separation. We are separate, aren't we? I'm here, and you're there.

If we understand this separation to be simply a conventional reality, there is no attachment. We are merely using it for communication and for practical reasons. But for most people that separation is the real world: "Look after yourself. You have to look after yourself first.' 'I have to protect myself. I only have one life, and I've got to see that I can get everything I can out of it.' Parents say, 'Now, Sonny-boy, you've got to be careful, you are not getting any younger. You've got to make sure that you have your pay cheque and your social security, your insurance, your hospital and medical insurance.' People think, 'When I get old, I don't want to be a burden.' The elderly can be perceived as burdensome and they see themselves as burdensome, because of identification with the age of the body.

Contemplating this, we can observe all that we create out of these illusions: 'I don't want to be a burden. ... I should, I shouldn't. ... I would like to be ... You should be, you shouldn't be ... You ought, you ought not to . . .' and on and on in this fashion. Views, opinions, identifications, preferences, attachments of all kinds - this is what we call 'the real world', this is what we believe in as reality.

If you pick up a London newspaper you'll find all about "the real world'. You can read about the financial problems and the business world, the economic problems of Britain, the United States, the problems of the Soviet Union, and the problems of the Third World countries. Problems of individuals: who's divorcing whom, who's having an affair with whom. Who's being a burden, who's not being a burden, and all kinds of advice over what you should or shouldn't be. That's "the real world', encapsulated in a few sheets of paper, with photographs.



Now that 'real' world is a poverty stricken world. It's meaningless. If one believes in that and attaches to it then life is a very depressing, increasingly depressing experience - because the world of separation, alienation and division is a world of despair. It's anguishing. Most of it is not particularly joyful - it's dukkha, it's suffering. So what does it mean to be fully human? To be fully human is to be moral: you can't say you are fully human unless you keep at least the five moral precepts - otherwise you are only human some of the time. Now moral responsibility, willingness to be responsible for one's actions and one's speech, is not instinctual, is it? Instincts don't care about speech and actions. In instinctual nature, if something is in your way then you just kick it out or kill it. The animal kingdom doesn't have very much to say; the animal world doesn't seem to have developed highly complicated speech patterns like humans. It's survival of the fittest in the animal kingdom, because there's not the ability to rise up to a moral commitment. To be responsible on the moral plane is a uniquely human opportunity. So, in Buddhist terms, it's only when we rise to that moral plane that we can say we are fully human. This is fulfillment of our humanity, not a rejection of it.

Note that so much of the violence and murder is done in the name of something noble: 'Kill the Heretics! . . . Kill the Communists!' But this is all from the position of a 'not-quite' human, isn't it? It's non-humans that do all this - because to be human, you have to be moral. The first precept - Panatipata veramani, to refrain from intentionally taking life - is actually applied, for us, to all beings. It is not for us to decide who is going to live and who isn't. Other beings have as much right to be here, to live on this planet, to breathe, as we do. So this is the beginning of Humanity, because this is something we can choose - instinct doesn't choose to do this. If somebody is being a threat or a bother, our instincts tell us to get rid of them as quickly as possible. But the human side says, 'Would I like to be treated like that? Is that fair, is that right, is that a proper thing to be doing?'

My instincts say, 'Kill the mosquitoes! They're a nuisance, they give you malaria. . . . Kill those blasted midges; get rid of them as quickly as possible!' But then the human side says that they have as much right to be here as I do. Who am I to think that I, somehow, am more important or have more right to breathe and to live my life than midges do? So then from that position, I'm a little kinder, aren't I? I'm not so quick to destroy that which I don't like - which bothers me or is a nuisance - and I am much more willing to give it a chance, to try and understand it, to respect it for what it is, even though I may never like it. I can't imagine myself ever liking midges - they are just not likeable to humans. But one can accept them for what they are. When you contemplate the amount of irritation they cause, then it's not that much; one can put up with it, one can bear it - it's just the way things are. Their lives are as important to them as my life is to me.

That is rising up to the plane of humanity. But I'm sure that the midge doesn't reflect like that; I'm sure the midge doesn't say, 'Look, there's Venerable Sumedho - he keeps the moral precepts, I'm not going to bite him!' They are not human; they cannot rise up to the human plane.

But we can sink down to their's very quickly. They are pain of the sensory realm and following the instinctual tendencies of those bodies with their survival mechanisms and all that. What we are doing in Buddhist practice is rising beyond mere human existence towards the refuges of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha - towards the transcendent, the Death-less, Nibbana. For this, the human foundation is necessary; we have to be fully human before we can expect to get beyond that. In order to transcend it, we have to fully accept the instinctual plane and respect it for what it is; we no longer condemn it or identify with it. We can respect the midges, and the mosquitoes, and all the other beings. So we are not judging the instinctual plane, or exalting it. It is what it is - it's like this. We refrain from doing evil - from intentionally doing cruel, unkind, selfish, mean things, or using our ability to speak for harming others. Then from that human plane we can aspire to the transcendent Deathless

Realm, Amaravati. Our bodies will die when it is the time for them to go; they die - that is their nature. The human realm is not an end in itself. We have to learn from the human experience - to know it, and rise up to it - but no longer attach to or identify with it, because humanity is not what we are. We are not really humans either! But, paradoxically, we have to be fully human to realise we are not human. From the human plane we can contemplate the instinctual plane. When you are caught in the instinctual plane you can't very well contemplate it, because you are just caught into that level of activity and reaction. But going to the human plane, one can be very much aware of the instinctual one for what it is. Then, from the transcendent plane, we can understand the human one. Much of our meditation is on seeing our own human limitations for what they really are; that's why morality is such an important part of our training. Daily reflections are also very important. We take time to consider what it is to be human, and what is necessary for human survival: 'What do we really need?', rather than 'What do we really want?' 'What is necessary for living in the society in the right way?' As a Sangha, we must consider how to be living examples for the society to see the beauty of humanity, the gentleness, the kindness, the propriety of it - the wisdom of the human realm. However, we are definitely not just pointing to the human realm, but also beyond it. I find it very helpful to just be able to contemplate what it is to be a human being - to be conscious. What is it to be born and to age? All the things that are affecting each one of us are to be contemplated; none of it is to be dismissed or rejected. The instinctual realm, the realm of survival and procreation, the emotional realm, the intellectual realm, the ability to feel and to love and to hate and so forth - all these are natural phenomena (dhammas) for us to reflect on and to understand. Then as you awaken more and more, and contemplate and understand more of the Dhamma, you can understand why this world is the way it is.



<b>THIS ISSUE</b>	Cover: ■ The Real World; Ajahn Sumedho	<b>HOME</b> ■
	Articles: ■ Beginners' Minds: From newly-robed bhikkhus	<b>BACK ISSUES</b> ■
Editorial: ■	■ Guidelines for Cultivation; Master Hsuan Hua	
	■ The Golden State; Amaro Bhikkhu	
	■ Sanghapala: an introduction; Marc Lieberman	

## Beginners' Minds: Newly-robed bhikkhus

*Three of the six men went forth as bhikkhus this past summer offer their reflections after their first Vassa ('Rainy-season Retreat).*

My final year as an anagarika was spent at Harnham, and Luang Por Sumedho spent most of that year abroad. I had already determined in my own mind that I would take the Going Forth at the earliest opportunity, but it remained very un-certain when Luang Por would make the invitation. Some two months before the ordination day word came: Would I like to join the Bhikkhu Sangha?

My immediate response was just, 'Wonderful! Yes, of course!' - no hesitation. For the next three weeks I gloried in the thought, 'At last my anagarika days are coming to a close!', and I bathed in this amazing sense of uplift that I had been invited to become a bhikkhu.

That soon changed.

Later on I found myself anticipating just how difficult life could become for me. Old fears arose like phantoms: 'Supposing I don't get on with this monk or that monk? There must be an easier way. . . . Maybe it won't work out how I want.'

I determined to relinquish, to put down, all these fears and anticipation of the future and to give up this old self, who was about to die and be reborn as a monk - a new start! I had been a terrible anagarika; now I had this opportunity to start anew.

When I was ordained I experienced an extraordinary sense of good-will and support from everyone. The Ordination event itself was infused with a deep sense of uncertainty of the future, a genuine sense of burning one's bridges, of relinquishing the past. I thought of my mother, who I knew was dying. In any heart I thanked her for all the support and goodwill she had given me, knowing that my best offering to her was this Going Forth.

---

A natural response is to ask, 'What can I offer in return?'

---

So, having become bhikkhus, we six undertook to study the discipline regulating the conduct of monks - the Vinaya. I expect I will always be learning what it is to be a monk - I am sure the appreciation for the life- style grows as the years pass by

Half-way through the vassa I had an urgent letter from my brother recommending a visit to my mother before she died. I was fortunate to be with her the day before she passed away. I made my offering to live this Holy Life to its fullest. I know she was happier for me now that I had been fully accepted into the monastic community. I felt certain this would be our last meeting, so I made my farewell very final, thanking her for all the kindness and support she

had given for a lifetime.

On hearing of her passing away the following morning, I could only marvel at my good fortune to have been able to speak with her - so there was nothing left unsaid, no regrets. Two days later I returned for a retreat in Chithurst Forest. It was a time to contemplate just what it meant to Go Forth from the home life into homelessness. In the forest there is just nature, nothing outstanding to distract the mind. I found living amongst the trees for two weeks very conducive to just abiding in the present moment, with this quality of relaxation - relinquishing any concern or anxiety I had of past and future. I felt a greater appreciation for the newness of the present moment, which is always now.

*Gandhasilo Bhikkhu*

o o o 0 o o o

**ONE of the most striking impressions** soon after the ordination was the increased respect and devotion shown by the laity. As an anagarika I had received some of this, but a considerable change seemed to have occurred. The realisation was, and continues to be, a powerful one. Whereas, from one perspective, the Going Forth appeared as personal experience - concerning me solely as an individual - I see that inevitably the repercussions, and responsibilities, are much broader. In a sense, I went forth not just for me but also for others who share a similar aspiration. The monastic form reminds me of this relationship continually, as my daily material requisites depend on the kindness and faith of the laity.

A natural response is to ask, 'What can I offer in return?' The main emphasis as a junior monk is to become acquainted with the Patimokkha discipline and related duties. Primarily this means paying close attention to those senior, who act as guides and teachers. Fortunately, we are not asked to go out immediately and teach Dhamma - normally this doesn't occur until one's fifth year - but we do have the opportunity to speak with guests and visitors in the monastery. However, I see this as happening incidentally, during informal moments.

So what can I offer? Firstly, I can make the earnest effort to learn and live by the training rules. The experience as a junior monk is a humbling one; continually one makes mistakes, as the focus of one's attention is refined to so many new areas. An attitude of beginning again becomes necessary. Laity who witness this process can be inspired; it is an important reminder that the virtue of morality requires cultivation - we aren't simply born with good conduct.

Helpful guidelines are necessary, too, for lay life to



establish a useful and suitable moral code. The five precepts can be interpreted broadly, and the monastic discipline - which is essentially an expansion on these - offers skilful means on how one can apply them in one's life.

Secondly, I can act as a symbol of quietness which makes the monastery such a precious place. Such quietness is a rarity in a world which does not encourage restraint regarding action of speech and body. I believe that stillness and peace of mind are greatly facilitated by a quiet environment. One is not obliged here to maintain certain social customs, like casual chatting or even making eye-contact with others. Of course one is welcome to do so if one wishes, but there is the opportunity to refrain. Possibly this is confusing, even intimidating to people - especially new-comers. I hope that there is a minimum of misunderstanding in this. I can honestly state that other people's presence needn't be a distraction or disturbance for me. In fact, I am greatly uplifted in being with other people who, I feel, equally treasure quietness - from this a lovely kinship comes about.

So for those who similarly seek refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, I hope that I can act as encouragement and live honourably in this life of mutual dependence.

*Suriyo Bhikkhu*

o o o 0 o o o

**THIS summer I was given** a small jade plant to look after in my room. I was glad both for the life and colour it brought to an otherwise barren room, and for the associations jade plants have with my mother who tended, took cuttings, and kept many of them around our house while I was growing up. It became a focus for attention, something to care about, watch grow, and attend to its need for water and sunlight.

It was a rather small plant, and after a few days I noticed that there was a clump of hearty, fast growing grass in one corner of the pot. 'That's not very nice,' I thought, as I reached to yank it out by its roots.

But then I remembered, 'Oh yeah, I can't do that any more. It's an offence to damage any living plant.' And my hand stopped in mid-pluck. A little peeved at that moment of mindfulness and conscience, my next thought was to go straight out and beckon an anagarika to perform the task. I wouldn't have told him exactly what to do, but a rather strong hint surely would have gotten the job done - and after all hinting is permissible for bhikkhus, and it's only a weed and it doesn't look very nice and why shouldn't I . . . ?

I watched my mind race down this course of justification, gathering momentum and conviction with each successive argument. I stopped, and laughed at myself for having worked myself up into a lather over a blade of grass. This led to a very important insight into how the Vinaya actually works, and to a deeper appreciation for the refinement of training that this bhikkhu life offers. It also increased my respect for the value of restraint, which enables one to see more clearly the subtleties and complexities of the motivations and impulses within one's own mind.

Had it been any other occasion that clump of grass would have been gone in a flash. But, due to the prohibition against harming or destroying plant life in the Patimokkha rule, I was forced to restrain my impulse and conditioning, much to my chagrin, but much for my benefit. For I saw the complete arising and passing away of an aversion event. How just upon merely seeing that grass, my mind immediately went through the programme: "It's a weed, get rid of it, do anything you can, just get rid of it, it's spoiling MY jade plant, the rule is get an anagarika,

## GET RID OF IT!

Our minds do this - more often than we'd care to admit! There are so many things we don't like, can't stand, or can't be bothered with, and this fact causes us much irritation and pain. But a clump of grass is just a clump of grass, you might say; unwelcome perhaps in a potted plant, but certainly not worthy of a moral dilemma. But does that excuse the feelings of indignation, aversion, and violence that took shape in my mind? Are petty irritations really any different, other than in degree, from more tangible and volatile thoughts of anger towards animals, other people, ourselves, or nations - no matter how solidly justified? Or are we each individually responsible and accountable unto ourselves for such thoughts of ill-will and malevolence that arise in our minds? Not that we shouldn't have them and should try to get rid of them (does that sound vaguely familiar?), but because we really do have the potential to understand and be free from our identification with all thoughts of harm and reproach. That seems to be the point of Vinaya: to stop one's habitual reactions; to lead one away from harmful influences and compulsions; and to yoke one to a practice through which one can see clearly that which leads to harm, and thereby train oneself not to move in that direction. The Vinaya forces us to bring awareness into the mundane aspects of our lives - into the watering of plants and the washing-up. We bring our attention to observe and learn how we relate to the things and the people around us. By witnessing how this works on the small and ordinary scale, we familiarise ourselves with the mechanisms and movements of our habits. Through understanding how they function, we can begin to hold in check and dismantle those forces that cause so much disruption and conflict in our lives as well as in the world.

The grass is still growing. It's taller than the jade plant now. I water them both equally and they continue to be my teachers.

*Sugato Bhikkhu*



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

**Cover:** ■ The Real World; Ajahn Sumedho  
**Articles:** ■ Beginners' Minds: From newly-robed bhikkhus  
 ■ Guidelines for Cultivation; Master Hsuan Hua  
 ■ The Golden State; Amaro Bhikkhu  
 ■ Sanghapala: an introduction; Marc Lieberman

**HOME****BACK ISSUES**

## Guidelines to Success in Cultivation

*The Sangha at Amaravati was privileged recently to receive the Venerable Master Hua and the Dharma Delegation from the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Our esteemed visitors stayed for nearly a week, providing many occasions of inspiration. By way of tribute, the following teaching is presented, from Master Hua's Herein Lies the Treasure Trove, Volume II.*

If you don't intend to seek the good, then the ghosts seeking revenge for offenses don't come to find you. But the more you want to be good, the more they come looking for you to get their revenge. This results from the karma you have created from limitless kalpas until now. Although you can't really say that there's any noticeable amount of good within our past actions, there's certainly a whole lot of bad karma that we have created. Where good and bad karma are mixed together, if one tries to cultivate the Way, then all of one's creditors will come and demand repayment. It's like someone who was originally very poor and who borrowed a lot of money that he hasn't managed to pay back. When he was poor and had no way of paying them back, his creditors didn't demand payment. But then that person strikes it rich, and his creditors know there's no better time to ask.

Therefore, when you cultivate the Way and run into some kind of adverse state, you should progress forward with greater vigor and courage. Never retreat from your resolve for Bodhi. And you should certainly repay all of the creditors who arrive demanding repayment.

How are you going to repay them? You can take all of the merit and virtue that you are creating and transfer it to those seeking revenge. When they receive that merit and virtue, they will escape from suffering and attain bliss, escape from birth and cast off death. You can't try and declare bankruptcy to avoid paying back what you owe. And so it is said that when you want to be a good person, your creditors will seek revenge. All those creditors are people to whom you owe something. Life after life, time after time, this process of creating debts has been going on, brought about by a variety of causes and conditions. You have no way of knowing for sure how much wrong you have done in the past. Disregarding past lives, just look at your present life - how many lives of other beings have you taken in this very lifetime, and how many unjust things have you done? You may say, 'I haven't done any major killing.' Well, maybe you haven't done any killing to speak of, but still, each and every person could easily have killed without being aware of it. If you haven't done any killing, you must still have taken many small lives. And even if you haven't done any large-scale killing, you still have thoughts of killing in your mind. Large lives would include cows, horses, pigs, dogs, chickens and the like. Then there are smaller living creatures, like frogs, mice, mosquitoes, ants, gnats - can you say that you have never killed any such little creature?

---

If you want to become a Buddha, You must first  
undergo the demons.

---

Even if you took life without realizing what you were doing at the time, so your offense was unintentional, still you have harmed living creatures and robbed them of their lives. Therefore, as soon as you decide to cultivate the Way, it's very possible that they will come and demand repayment. And there aren't just one or two debts like that - there's no way of knowing how many there are. They have mounted up day after day, month after month, accumulating lifetime after lifetime for limitless kalpas until now. It's impossible to describe them - they are so many. But you can't be unfair about it and say, 'Well I am cultivating, and I just won't recognize all those creditors who are seeking repayment for all the wrong I have done in the past.' If you think that way, you will never be able to accomplish the Way. You have not yet established a sense of justice within your own heart. How can one establish justice in one's heart? By recognizing that one has debts that must be repaid. If you recognize what you owe, then you will understand and repay those debts; when all your debts are repaid the account will close. And so it is said:

*If you want to learn to be good, The resentful enemies from your past offences will seek you out.*

That is because now you are a 'fat cat', and so all your poor friends are going to look you up; they all want to gain advantage from you.

If you want to become a Buddha, You must first undergo the demons.

Who helps Buddhas become Buddhas? Demons help them. If there weren't any demons, there wouldn't be any Buddhas. And it's just because there are demons that there are Buddhas. They come to test you. They help you to progress and take another step forward. Because, as it's said:

*If you wish to see another thousand miles, Then go up another flight of stairs.*

They come to see if you are really up to it - whether you've got true spirit. If you've got it, then in the face of a hundred hardships you won't retreat from your Bodhi resolve. The harder and more difficult it gets, the more determined you will be to cultivate. Then no matter what difficulty or opposition comes your way, you'll get through it with ease. you'll never feel there's anything unfair about your predicament; you'll never find fault with heaven or blame others. If you can be that way, then whether things go your way or not, you will be developing your skill in the Paramita of Patience. And if you perfect your skill in patience, then whatever demonic obstacles come along, you will own up to them, accept, and recognize them. You won't have enmity towards the demons. You will feel that if you yourself undergo a little bitterness, it won't matter. You will even make a vow to rescue the demons, so that they too will take refuge with the Triple Jewel and set their minds on Bodhi.

Never think that anything or anyone is an enemy. Don't harbor the least bit of vengeance in your thoughts. Then you can:

*Change lances and spears into jade and cloth.*

That is, change enmity and hatred into kindness and compassion. Look for the good side of everything, and don't just consider yourself as all-important. Don't always

## Bowing

How can I be a grassblade?  
Delicate but strong, firmly-rooted  
yet always ready to bow to the  
Universe  
when asked by the slightest gust.

How might I be a blade of grass?  
Yielding and receptive  
but immovable from my chosen spot  
in the garden of earth.

How can I not doubt, not cry?  
enduring darkness and drought,  
forgetting defeat to serve the sky  
and grow in the light.

I honour the fields and the flowers, my hosts,  
the birds who drink dew from my arms,  
the food I am when I offer myself

be arguing in your own defense, saying, 'Look at who I am. You are being so impolite to me!' We shouldn't have that kind of thought. If your affairs aren't going right, you should examine yourself and understand that the problem lies within yourself. Always look for your own mistakes, not other's wrongs.

Truly recognise your own faults And don't discuss the faults of others. Other's faults are just my own - Being one with everyone is called Great Compassion.

Being one with everyone includes all living beings, not just Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. or Sound Hearers and Those Enlightened by Conditions. It also includes demons. It means being of the same substance with demons, too.

Cultivators of the Way here, most of all, must not be selfish or seek for self benefit. Benefit others; do not harm others to benefit yourself. This is extremely important. And don't always look down on other people, being discontent with what others are doing and feeling that only you yourself right. Many people here in the past were like that, people who had that very fault. They didn't make it. Their failures can act like mirror for us all. Each of us should examine ourselves. Take a look at our past, at what we are doing right now, and consider the future. If we can be mindful in this way and never forget our good heart and virtue in the Way, then over time, very naturally our good roots will increase. And if our good roots increase, then our resolve for the Way will deepen. And if we make a big resolve for the Way, we will be able to practise the Bodhisattva Way and benefit all living beings. It is all connected.

You need not fear demons. When a demonic obstacle comes along, you shouldn't give up retreat, saying, 'I have been a left-home person for so many years have been cultivating for so long, and I have accumulated so much merit virtue - how can I still have demonic obstacle?' You can't say that. Demonic obstacles are your tests.

in complete surrender

To insects, a friendly cow  
or some other hungry beast.  
They will chew and be nourished and I  
will disappear without a trace.

***Sister Medhanandi***



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

**Cover:** ■ The Real World; Ajahn Sumedho  
**Articles:** ■ Beginners' Minds: From newly-robed bhikkhus  
 ■ Guidelines for Cultivation; Master Hsuan Hua  
 ■ The Golden State; Amaro Bhikkhu  
 ■ Sanghapala: an introduction; Marc Lieberman

**HOME****BACK ISSUES**

## The Golden State

*This is the first of two pieces by Venerable Amaro which describe a visit made by members of the Sangha to the United States earlier this year. The first part covers the broad spectrum of spiritual life which was encountered; the second part (to follow in April) will dwell more specifically on seclusion and monastic practice in the USA.*

### Part I: A Fertile Sea

It is said that in the past - before the Europeans came - the San Francisco Bay area was so thick with wild life that the sky would be darkened by flocks of birds as they rose 'with a sound like that of a hurricane'. Streams were filled with silver salmon; the hills covered with forests of oak and berries, fields of flowers and bunch-grass; seals, grizzly bears, foxes, bobcats and coyotes abounded. It was 'a land of inexpressible fertility'. In the last 150 years of 'civilization', much has changed. But by some strange alchemy the fertility of the area persists: transmogrified from the rich life of local tribes and that of soil and beast, into the inner life, the hearts and minds of the people who now live there.

The USA, a land of opportunity, grew out of a revolution against European values. It was to be a country of freedom and equality. This ideal still pervades American society and probably nowhere more so than on the West Coast, where the majority of 'free spirits' have gravitated. Here especially is a place of freedom of expression, where dreams of all kinds are pursued.

o o o o o o o

In May of 1990, Venerable Ajahn Sumedho, Sister Sundara, Sister Jotaka and myself were invited to the USA to lead some retreats, participate in a conference on monasticism, and to give Dhamma talks to a number of groups on the West Coast. The invitation came from two groups: Insight Meditation West (IMW), founded to promote Vipassana meditation, mostly in the form of silent retreats and local 'sitting' groups; and Sanghapala, whose aim is to help establish a monastery in California under the guidance of Ajahn Sumedho. These two groups represent, to a large extent, the main sources of interest in our presence in the USA.

The two aspects of our life which they embody - serious meditation practice and traditional monastic form - are in fact closely linked, although the latter is less widely appreciated. It was to help people in the Bay Area have a fuller understanding of monastic practice, its methods and its results, that Jack Kornfield, the principal meditation teacher with IMW, convened the conference 'The Joys of Monastic Life' which we attended.

---

Spiritual practice is shaped around formal sitting and walking meditation, and blended with a Western psychological vernacular to describe the inner world being investigated.

---

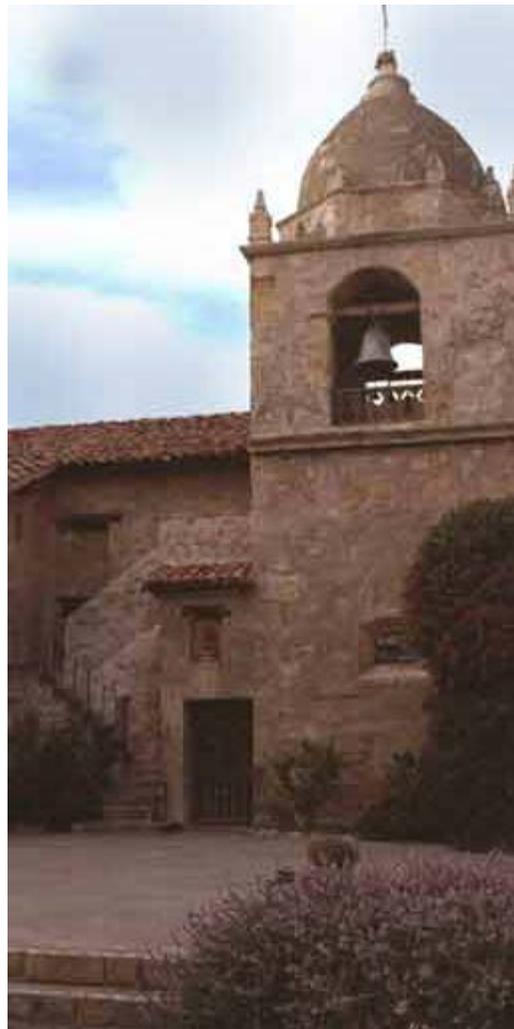
The practice which Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho have advocated involves taking Vinaya - the monastic code of discipline - as the basic life style, and from that foundation learning to appreciate whatever you are with. Putting this teaching into practice, we actually found ourselves able to feel at ease in a bewildering variety of environments: from the Esalen Institute to The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas; from the Zen Center AIDS hospice to a seminar with Huston Smith and a dozen academic philosophers; from a gathering in Chicago of all the Thai monks in the USA, to days of silence spent high in the hills of Northern California at the Bell Springs Hermitage.

The people we seemed to meet the most had been practising Vipassana meditation for a number of years - often through retreats at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts or on the West Coast, with teachers such as Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, and Christopher Titmuss. In many of the West Coast urban areas - notably Santa Cruz, Palo Alto, Berkeley, Marin County, Portland, Seattle and Vancouver - fairly large groups of people meet regularly to meditate, listen to Dharma talks and discuss any problems in their spiritual life. These loosely-knit groups of people hold their focus around their teachers and meditation groups, and around Insight Meditation West. In addition to running retreats, IMW is in the process of establishing a sizeable meditation centre, Spirit Rock, in the countryside just north of San Francisco.

A prominent feature of this group's style of practice is the conscious movement away from traditionalist Theravada Buddhist forms. Spiritual practice is shaped around formal sitting and walking meditation, and blended with a Western psychological vernacular to describe the inner world being investigated. This has worked well - very many people have found inspiration and benefit from this approach - but it seems that for some we met, there are areas of spiritual practice left unaddressed ... or, at least, some potential in their hearts which has not had the opportunity to flower.

One area where this difficulty appears is in the basic premise which motivates the practice: i.e. what is assumed at the outset. By couching spiritual work in a psychological idiom - even though it is thereby more accessible - the practice can be construed in terms of "me and my problems, which I have got to get rid of. This is fair enough - "me without problems' is much more attractive than 'me with problems'. However, the longer this premise is followed blindly, the greater is the resulting anguish. According to conventional Buddhist understanding, the person doesn't have problems, the 'person' is the problem. It is because of conceiving everything in terms of 'me' and 'mine', in an absolute sense, that we continue to suffer and fret.

So, as Ajahn Sumedho pointed out over the weeks, we have to make a paradigm shift: from 'me and my problems', to 'the Buddha seeing the Dhamma'. Buddha wisdom is the ultimate subject - The One Who Knows'. And Dhamma - 'The Way Things Are', Nature - is the ultimate object, which can have no owner. As this shift is made, the heart is liberated. The world still is the way it is, but it's no longer a problem, and it's certainly not 'mine'.



A second area of hazy misunderstanding was devotional practice. As with all our retreats, at the ten days organized by IMW at Santa Rosa we had a period of chanting and bowing before the shrine at the start of each morning and evening meditation. We made it clear that joining in was not compulsory, and it took a good few days for many people to get a feel for the role of puja in relationship to meditation and self-knowledge. However, by the fourth or fifth day we noticed more and more vigour coming into the pujas. Ritual and devotion can be a way of reasserting, on the emotional plane, the aspiration to enlightenment - a way of engaging the faculties of the heart, along with those of the head, in empowering the practice of the Path. Likewise, the Sangha embodies an archetypal principle, which can help unite one with the lineage of all who have ever practised as disciples of the Buddha.

The pujas were done in English, to lend a little more to their relevance, and they became a key-note in the practice for many people. They made such an impact, in fact, that by the end of the retreat some of the sceptics professed themselves to have been thoroughly sold'. Several Buddhist groups that we subsequently visited particularly requested that we do some chanting, or that I speak on the subject. There is a natural need in us to honour that which is good, higher, more noble, and it seems that people realized that making appropriate gestures of respect on the material level can be something beautiful. In our hearts we are bowing to wisdom, truth and virtue, to purity, radiance and peacefulness, not to a golden idol.

Balancing the intellectual and emotional elements in harmonious measure is also developed outside the shrine room through the work of serving others. In the Bay Area, service is found particularly in the area of hospice care. The growth of Buddhist involvement in care for the dying has been seeded from the long-standing efforts of such people as Steven Levine and Ram Dass. In the last few years, however, it has taken shape as a full-blown hospice programme in three locations under the auspices of the San Francisco Zen Center. The two doctors looking after the hospice ward in a local hospital are Zen Center students and much of

the daily care and counselling, assistance to the nurses, etc, is given by a team of some forty volunteers, most of whom are with the Zen Center or IMW.

The joint involvement of Zen and Vipassana students is something that has actively been encouraged by the groups. Not only is the burden of work shared, but meditators are also able to engage their talents in helpful service. Formal meditation and silent retreats can lend a somewhat introverted tone to spiritual life. Generosity and service impel our attention outwards and, to our surprise, we often find that simply by not thinking about ourselves so much many of our mental terrors vanish. Not only do others gain but we do also - the wondrous arising of the 'win / win situation'.

o o o 0 o o o

The last week that Venerable Sumedho and the nuns were in the USA was spent visiting Seattle. It is quite a cosmopolitan city and very reminiscent of San Francisco. Liberal and environmentally conscious in atmosphere, it too was a place to which people interested in Buddhist meditation had gravitated. The public talk which had been arranged attracted quite a large number, about half of whom had come down from Vancouver for the occasion.

Our hosts, aware of our full schedule in San Francisco, were keen not to exhaust us with too many 'events'. Thus most of the days were spent quietly, talking informally with the local Buddhists or travelling around the area.

When not obscured by cloud, Mt. Ranier is a vast volcanic snowy bulk which dominates the city. On the day we went to visit it, the dense cover broke just long enough for us to glimpse the peak. All around, and across thousands of acres of Washington countryside, evergreens carpet the land. In sharp contrast to California, the 'Golden State' (don't say 'brown' when looking at its meadows in the dry season), Seattle is aptly named 'The Emerald City'. Bearing the brunt of a huge rainfall off the northern Pacific Ocean, it is thus blessed with a dripping lushness all the year round.

The others bade farewell and took off for England. After a brief but very fine visit to Portland, I returned to San Francisco.

o o o 0 o o o

The people we visited in the Pacific North-west, as well as those we met around the San Francisco Bay, live far from the 'shop-til-ya-drop' mentality of materialistic America. If America does have any spiritual hope, one feels it will be through the likes of these people. America is a young country, and just as youth can be obsessed with intense sensuality and materialism, it can also have an intense spirituality, openness of mind, eagerness to learn and readiness to change.

This maturing of values resonated through all the established groups we visited, and also amongst those who came along to the regular talks and retreats that I was invited to give around the Bay Area in July: twice-weekly evening talks, and three evenly-spaced week-end retreats. During this time I was based in San Francisco, in a small apartment just around the corner from 10 Arbor Street where the meetings were held. The aim was to have something of a 'temporary monastery', where those who were interested could come and talk with the monk, meditate, or just step out of the momentum-driven world for a spell. Being in residence, I was also able to receive people who wished to offer alms, accept invitations to eat at people's houses and conduct blessing ceremonies for babies, houses and the newly-opened Bell Springs Hermitage.

A small amount of publicity had quietly filtered through local Theravada Buddhist circles. At

first the numbers of folk coming were low, but it was encouraging to see how, in just a short span of time, the level of interest reached 3 or 4 a day and, by the time I left for England in early August, the shrine room at Arbor Street was getting to be too small to contain everyone.

o o o 0 o o o

The Bay Area is truly a hot-house of spiritual seekers, yet the people we met did not seem to be those searching for the quick, hassle-free solution to all life's problems. (Local advert: 'Free credit - pay nothing 'til April!') Many had been steeped in one kind of spiritual medium or another - from psychedelia to therapy and meditation - since the late Sixties. These approaches had all promised freedom; many had helped but not quite succeeded in bringing the carefree fulfillment longed for.

While it is true that people will always come and check out a new product on the market, the interest directed towards us seemed to be more than just skin-deep. Buddha-Dhamma is not a cosmetic teaching. It was apparent that the example of the renunciant life, the surrender that comes from participation in a traditional form and the power and directness of the teachings, provided people with something that made a difference.

In this respect, the time I spent at the Esalen Institute is of interest. I was invited to spend a few days there, about 150 miles south of San Francisco, on the Big Sur coast - one of the most beautiful spots on earth. Esalen has been the birthplace of much Californian spirituality - in particular, most of the novel approaches to psychotherapy were hatched there.

The spiritual and terrestrial influences mingle at the institute very much like their statue of the Buddha, almost hidden amidst a swarm of flowers, sitting serenely at the heart of the garden. Quite by chance my visit coincided with a concerted move by the staff to establish more of a daily meditation practice for themselves. They were keen to invite monks and other meditation teachers to come and give them more consistent guidance. Like so many other spiritual communities, they had been through struggles and conflicts, and now felt the need to establish more clarity and cohesion. The Director and other staff expressed their hope to me that, should a monastery be established in the area, we would come and teach there periodically. Therapy is not enough any more!

o o o 0 o o o

American culture, for the most part, dispenses with the old, and renews/reforms/progresses. This theme carries on as strong as ever, but it is significant that the current problems of ill-health pollution and waste-disposal are reaching impossible proportions and people are waking up to the need to readjust their values. The adjustments have an American flavour, of course, which was evident in the large billboard advertising a bio-degradable throw-away camera, or the poster for a new low-fat yoghurt-based ice-cream substitute proudly promising 'All of the pleasure, none of the guilt'.

The few weeks we spent in the USA brought home the realization that the rising sensitivity to nature, and respect for the origin, substance and fate of the things we use, was reflected in a true change of attitude in the American Buddhist world. For, rather than just trashing the traditional ways of doing things - leaving classical monasticism and devotional practices entirely behind for the sake of a new, rational and hierarchy-free Buddhism - some people are finding it worthwhile to recycle the old. After all, like other things we try and dump, the old doesn't just go away - it has an annoying habit of hanging around for a long time before it decomposes. What if it turns out that there is a lot there that's still of use? - Such a waste just to sling it out.

People seem to be looking at traditional monastic practice with a fresh eye; its relegation as a

culturally antiquated, worn-out form is being revised. At the end of the 'Joys of Monastic Life' conference, when Jack Kornfield asked 'How many of you would consider entering a monastery, say for a period of at least a year?', 70-80% of the assembly raised their hands.

Certainly, some aspects of Buddhist custom are redundant and inapplicable to Western society. But, as our experience in Europe has shown, these elements are not related intrinsically to the Dhamma-Vinaya as described by the Buddha. And, as many eminent teachers in Asia point out, it might be good if such aspects of Buddhist custom were discarded in Asia as well.

This visit to the West Coast was arranged in order to provide access to the Sangha and to see if the traditional unit of monastery and lay-supporters had a useful place in American society. The impression that has lingered is not one of friction with people, or of materialistic and violent horrors - even though these perceptions were plentiful enough. These impressions fade, and what fills the heart is a quiet delight, echoing with endless highways of space and light, thick with oleanders. . . or islands rising in the early morning, out of miles of opal fog.

This is a rich land, there is goodness here - goodness in the land and in the hearts of the people - and it has been a joy to help the sincere find that which is truly golden.



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

**Cover:** ■ The Real World; Ajahn Sumedho  
**Articles:** ■ Beginners' Minds: From newly-robed bhikkhus  
 ■ Guidelines for Cultivation; Master Hsuan Hua  
 ■ The Golden State; Amaro Bhikkhu  
 ■ Sanghapala: an introduction; Marc Lieberman

**HOME****BACK ISSUES**

## Sanghapala: an Introduction

*Marc F. Lieberman, one of the founder members of Sanghapala, presents this account of the initial steps being taken to establish a branch monastery in the USA.*

Sanghapala is the name of a very hopeful and dedicated group of Buddhists in the United States who are working towards establishing a permanent monastic presence here: specifically, a branch monastery of the Sangha centers established by Ajahn Sumedho in the United Kingdom and elsewhere these past ten years. Inspired by the initial scale of Lord Buddha's successful discourse of the Turning of the Wheel to only five ascetics in an ancient Indian deer park, we hope our own modest numbers will eventually translate into widespread support for a facility that preserves and teaches the Dhamma to as many as possible.

Ajahn Sumedho chose the name Sanghapala - Pali for 'Guardians of the Sangha' - when he met with a few of us in Northern California after a retreat in 1989. Some of us had heard of Chithurst or Amaravati on the 'international Dharma circuit', had visited England, and returned to America intent on helping establish a monastic enterprise here. Others had first encountered bhikkhus while sitting on meditation retreats that they had led in the U.S., or had met the monks and nuns for the first time only during their comings and goings. For all of us, the aspiration is to provide opportunities in this country for this precious tradition to flourish.

o o o o o o o

The specific background leading up to our first event this year contains too the broader story of how we think Sanghapala fits into the fabric of Buddhism today in America. Our first task formally began with an invitation to Ajahn Amaro to remain as our guest in the San Francisco area for eight weeks, from mid-June through early August, 1990. He had come with the party of Ajahn Sumedho and Sisters Sundara and Jotaka; all had been invited by Jack Kornfield, James Baraz and their group, The Dharma Foundation (also known as Insight Meditation West, or Spirit Rock), both to jointly conduct a 10-day meditation retreat and to attend a weekend Conference on Monastic Life. The perceptions that led to the organization of the conference bring into focus the issues that we see Sanghapala addressing.

---

They strove to present the essence of the Buddha's teachings on meditation and the Path in as 'culture-free' a fashion as possible, intended for lay persons to practice themselves.

---

Ostensibly, the Conference was designed to expose the American Vipassana Community to monastics from both the Buddhist and Christian traditions - specifically to introduce and educate the lay students of Vipassana about the world-view and experience of monks and nuns. Though the term 'Vipassana Community' may strike some non-American ears as odd,

here in the Dharma circles of the United States it has a distinctive sociological connotation. It specifically refers to a wide and vast group - probably more than 100,000 over the past ten years - of lay persons who have at one time or another been taught and practiced Vipassana meditation. These teachings of meditation, however, have rarely been imparted by Theravadin monastics. Ordained monks in the United States have been for the most part confined in their following and influences to specific ethnic communities.

Instead, the meditation and Dhamma teachings were taught by lay Americans - e.g. Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Sujata, Jack Kornfield - who had been trained in the monasteries of Burma, Thailand or Sri Lanka in the 1970s. Inspired by Theravadin teachings and steeped in particular meditation techniques, these teachers usually taught in ways that emphasized experience, rather than faith or logic or inspiration. They strove to present the essence of the Buddha's teachings on meditation and the Path in as 'culture-free' a fashion as possible, intended for lay persons to practice themselves.

This approach deeply resonated with a generalized antipathy towards traditional religious forms and customs among many spiritually hungry - but religiously alienated - Americans. These meditation courses and retreats became (and continue to be) enormously popular. For many, this was a first exposure to calm and clarity, affording the opportunity for at least a glimpse of the true nature of things. People didn't attend because they wanted Buddhism as a new religion - they simply wanted the Buddha's experiences.

The extraordinary accessibility and success of this meditation practice, was because the Dhamma was presented in as generic a fashion possible. Classic Asian manifestations of the teachings in general - and devotional forms in particular -- were sometimes viewed with scepticism or even condescension, as being culture-bound historical accretions extraneous to the Buddha's teachings on Liberation. Lacking the charismatic Buddhist authorities found in Tibetan and Zen practice, Vipassana meditators informally aggregated into a democratic and egalitarian community of lay teachers and practitioners, intent on integrating the householder's life with the Path of Insight. Without exposure to traditional practicing Sangha communities - who seek to ground their spiritual experience in the traditional discipline of the Vinaya - the practical value and role of committed monastics largely remained outside the purview of the American Vipassana community.

In America in general (and California especially) the idea of a life of voluntary renunciation and celibacy is fairly alien. At worst, it resonates with a negative implication of repression and blind submission to authority. Unlike England or Europe, where the medieval traditions of Catholic monasteries, nunneries and hermitages persist in the mental landscape as viable adjuncts to lay communal life, there are no such architectural or intellectual associations for the American mind. In fact, when the idea was raised several years ago that perhaps Ajahn Sumedho's Sangha could be offered land to establish a monastery north of San Francisco, there was strong resistance and reservation expressed by the laity.

**Venerable Ananda tells the Buddha of the passing away of Venerable Sariputta:**

'Indeed, Lord, when I heard this, I felt as though my body were quite rigid; I could not see straight, and all my ideas were unclear.'

'Why Ananda, do you think that by finally attaining nibbana he has taken away the code of virtue or the code of concentration or the code of understanding or the code of deliverance or the code of knowledge and vision of deliverance?'

'Not that, Lord. But I think how helpful he was to his fellows in the Holy Life, advising, informing, instructing, urging, rousing and encouraging them; how tireless he was in teaching them the Law. We remember how the Venerable Sariputta fed us and enriched us and helped us with the Law.'

'Ananda, have I not already told you that there is separation and parting and division from all that is dear and beloved? How could it be that what is born, come to being, formed, and subject to fall, should not fall? That is not possible. It is as if a main branch of a great tree standing firm and solid had fallen; so too, Sariputta has finally attained nibbana in a great community that stands firm

Some of this apprehension was rooted in a widely-shared feminist perspective that is suspicious of traditional Asian monastic forms, which historically have favored the male in perpetuation of religious power structure and access to spiritual training. Traditional hierarchies were felt to be inherently anachronistic and sexist. In contrast to this substantial theoretical objection, there were others who had actually known first-hand of the qualities that the renunciant life can uniquely foster. For these people too, it was imperative that spiritual opportunities be gender-blind. But it need not mean that the ancient form of Sangha monasticism, rooted in the very Suttas themselves, be abandoned. In an attempt to air these two important perceptions, Jack Kornfield arranged for the Conference to be a symposium, allowing monks and nuns from several traditions to speak for themselves and with the interested laity.

and solid. How could it be that what is born, come into being, formed, and bound to fall, should not fall? That is not possible. Therefore, Ananda, each of you should make himself his island, himself and no other his refuge; each of you should make the Law his island, the Law and no other his refuge.'(Kindred Sayings XLVII, 13; from *The Life of The Buddha* by Nyanamoli Thera, Buddhist Publication Society)

Those of us who comprise Sanghapala quite obviously have been profoundly moved and inspired by those who strive to impeccably cultivate the Path in the steps of the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah. We welcomed the coming to America of Ajahn Sumedho's party as an opportunity for this Sangha's mature members to be widely seen and heard. Having the indefatigable Ajahn Amaro stay on for two months allowed the shy, the curious and the inspired to come and share in the rhythms of a monk's life.

After the Conference's successful conclusion and the departure of Ajahn Sumedho and the nuns, Ajahn Amaro returned from visits outside California and dove into a full and energetic schedule. With the help of a resident layman, he lived in a rented flat in San Francisco, easily accessible to highway and public transport. This was but three blocks from the temporary home of Sanghapala, a private house with a large room dedicated as a meditation hail, complete with a large Buddha rupa and altar. Every morning there was 6 a.m. chanting and meditation; every Wednesday and Friday nights there was a 7.30 - 9 p.m. chanting, sitting and Dhamma talk. Five or six stalwarts actively volunteered to coordinate the provision of the daily meals, which were offered by people for whom meeting and offering almsfood to a monk was a novel experience.

Augmenting this weekly schedule, upon which people came to depend, were many other arrangements. Sittings were arranged at various Vipassana meditation groups across Northern California. Visits were made to Theravadin and Mahayana Temples, as well as to a hospital chaplaincy program and a Zen AIDS hospice. Every other weekend during Ajahn Amaro's stay, facilities were rented (at Stanford University to the south and a Dominican College to the north of San Francisco) and two-day, non-residential meditation retreats were conducted.

The common theme of all these many activities was the exposure of hundreds of lay people to an articulate, generous-hearted and accessible Western-born bhikkhu. By conversation, sharing meals and learning to observe the etiquette of the Discipline, many people who never before had any experience of the monastic life now at least had met with a happy and non-intimidating monk for themselves.



Sanghapala's purpose, then, really has two aspects. First is the laying of the groundwork and support base to be able to invite and sustain a monastic presence in the United States. For now this is done by simply arranging for as many monks and nuns to come to the States for as long as they can: the inspiration and support spontaneously arises. Thus it was with the extended visit of Ajahn Amaro in 1990. And such is the intention for next year's plans as well.

We have invited two monks (including Ajahn Sumedho) and two nuns to come as Sanghapala's guests for three weeks next spring. By the gracious hospitality of the Sagely City of 10,000 Buddhas in Ukiah, California (2 hours' drive north of San Francisco), facilities have been offered to provide for a two-week 'Amaravati Retreat'. Rather than exclusively emphasizing focused concentration on sitting and walking, as found on many Vipassana retreats, this retreat will simulate the daily life of a monastery, with mindful interaction among the laity and the Sangha. It remains to be determined whether the format will be based on the schedule used for monastic meditation/contemplation retreats, or on the typical daily-life/work schedule of the British monasteries. Tentative dates are from June 21 through July 5, 1991. After that, Ajahn Amaro will again stay on for an extended visit, allowing the nascent group of Sangha supporters here to grow and nurture these important symbiotic habits of the heart.

Which brings us to the second aspect of Sanghapala's purpose. It is simply to make available a holistic vision of Buddhist practice: embracing not only meditation, but devotional practices and the eventual establishment of a Buddhist community, capable of sustaining itself and a formal Sangha. Such a community is seen as enriching and complementing the larger and less formal Vipassana community. By facilitating the support of women and men who have chosen to live their lives in accordance with the Buddha's dispensation, and who realize in their demeanor and being the cultivation of the fruits of the Path, all beings can be inspired and enhanced in their own perfection of the Way.

o o o 0 o o o

For more information regarding the 'Amaravati Retreat', please write to Sanghapala, 10 Arbor Street, San Francisco, California 94131. (Telephone: 415-334-4921).

Of particular value will be people experienced in organizing and sustaining a retreat community. There will be minimal distinctions between staff and retreatants, with ample opportunity for all to practice together.

