



# FOREST SANGHA

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## Mature Emotions

Ajahn Vajiro is the senior incumbent of Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand.

In the teachings of the Buddha there are mentioned the Brahma Viharas. These are usually translated as the divine, or heavenly abidings. This is from a literal translation: Brahma - God, and Vihara - Dwelling. They can be brought down from the heavens, to earth, by considering that as emotions they motivate and encourage the transcending of the limitations of basic human existence. This 'transcending of limitation' is a definition of growing. For the seed of this idea I am grateful to a friend who pointed out that they can be considered the mature emotions. What follows are a few further reflections; not intended as a comprehensive analysis of the Brahma Viharas which may be found in a text-book on Buddhism.

Emotions, it seems clear to me, are motivating. I tend to think of them as those things that cause, or fuel, or drive us to, motion. They provide the fuel that drives the movement; the action, towards or away from some object or situation. We move and act through body, speech or mind and that movement is a response to the stimulation of the senses. It is in the responding that we can first notice the arising of emotions. Before the movement there is stimulation of the senses; this is the contact. A feeling follows, then perception; it is this which is mixed with, or linked to, the mature emotions. There is then in Pali no direct translation for the English word emotion. An emotion is a mixture of perception and sankhara - habit pattern; both of which may be consciously trained. Mature emotions are those emotions that are the response of, and fuel the movement of, the mature person.

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Mature emotions are . . . those emotions that allow  
other people to mature.

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Sometimes the goal of Buddhism can be described in terms that lead me to think that what is being sought is a cold emotionless passionless heart - no response, no feeling, no desires, no motivation. This conflicts with our image of the Buddha as someone with a strong motivation, a strong compassion to lead a life that would be of greatest benefit to all beings.

Mature emotions are also those emotions that allow other people to mature. So when a person acts or responds with mature emotion, other humans are helped in a way that allows them to transcend, to grow beyond their limitations. This appears abstract; and yet when we consider how parents can best allow their children to mature, it is through the expression of mature emotion.

The four 'maturing emotions', as explained here, may be realised, in practice, as being linked; only divided for the sake of convenient analysis and explanation. They are like different aspects of the same place, different ways of describing heaven. We describe the different aspects to help us to find a way of noticing them so we may express them, play with them, in our lives.

The metta - kindness - engendered in us encourages us to accept ourselves and others, and so to understand ourselves and others. Understanding implies wisdom. And this wisdom is that which allows us to find the way, to grow beyond, or let go of, that which limits and binds the heart. The kindness expressed to others allows them to accept themselves and others.

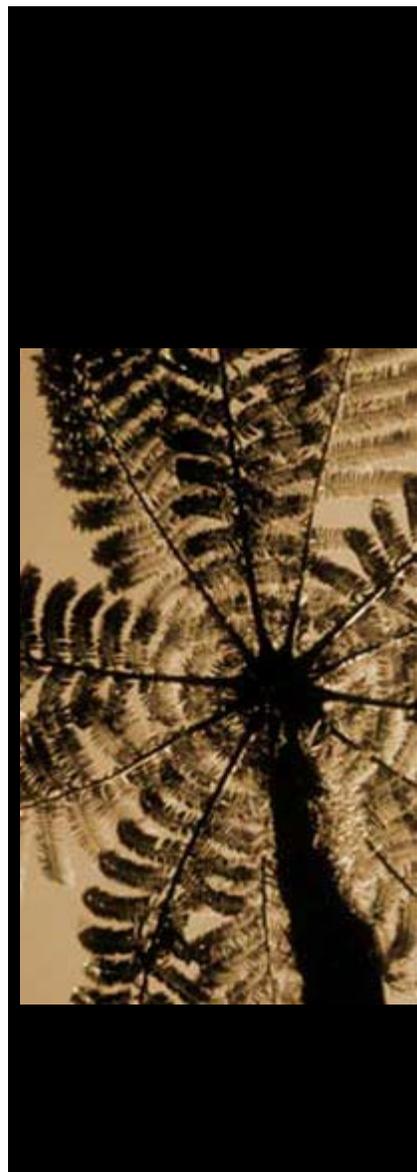
This is an emotional, gut or heart acceptance that allows the acts of body, speech and mind that are a response to that which is perceived as 'other' to be kind; not motivated by not-liking, not motivated by aversion or fear. The effect is unlimited. Metta is radiant and attractive, warming to those that are cold, cooling to those that are hot. -o ..... enjoy life.

Karuna - Compassion - works. It works for us in allowing us to perceive the pain, anguish, affliction, agony, torment and distress of others clearly, through allowing it into our experience also. It is then something that has moved further out of the realm of the ignored or the unconscious into the realm of the included, the accepted, the conscious.

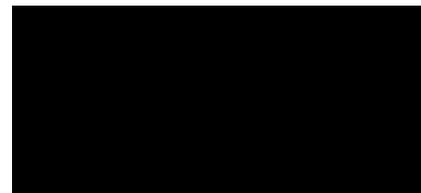
Compassion is spacious, allowing the way things are to exist, to change, and to end. Particularly it allows pain to end. This means that it must be patient, not in any hurry to force pain to end or to try officiously to get rid of pain. It is the active side of wisdom and is the supreme purifier. The Buddha's compassion allowed him to realise that there is still something that can be done by a fully enlightened being. It was compassion that motivated him to teach "for the benefit of those with little dust in their eyes".

Mercy is a way to think of compassion, a word not often used and yet evocative of the quality of heart that is willing to bear the burdens of others; willing to always help to the best of its ability, listening out for the cries for help and acting. The 'cries' may not be loud. It can be as ordinary as helping to clean-up after an event or set up before the event. Whenever we notice that some assistance would be appreciated and are willing to act to give it, we practise karuna.

Mudita is usually translated as sympathetic joy. This has meant little to me. The suggestions in the words of sympathy, pathetic and joy suggest an omelette that has a strange flavour. 'Sympathy' and 'joy' seem to mix easily; it is the addition of 'pathetic' by alliteration that jars the palate. Appreciate, joy, enjoy, and bring joy to, are words that evoke



from me the qualities of heart that are the opposite of envy and jealousy; the opposite of those qualities that wish to bring someone down to a lower level. is also a suffering that we can avoid; but it takes practice. It takes wise reflection, it takes effort and understanding.



Mudita implies full consciousness. We need to discriminate, to be conscious, to open to the possibility of appreciation. Particularly encouraged is consciousness of the good, the virtue and the wisdom of others. What mudita allows is the arising of an aspiration to do or to be likewise. Luang Por Sumedho has said that when we can appreciate the beauty of a rose in full bloom, we can be moved by mudita. The suggestion is to practise at all levels. Sometimes when looking at a rose we can be caught by so-called 'realism' and just see that the flower will fade; we can be a bit like Scrooge with "bah humbug", a sour response to any suggestion that beauty can be appreciated without falling into desire to possess or hold on to. The balance is provided when upekkha is present.

Upekkha: again first the usual translation - equanimity. I prefer serenity, with the implied suggestion of accepting limitation and rising above it. The phrase, "be serene in the oneness of things" has always struck me as a beautiful suggestion to my heart when there is frustration with the pace of life; the limitations of the universe; or the limitations of myself or others. There has to be a conscious acceptance of the limited way things are, to allow the heart to train to transcend that limitation.

On a mundane level, if I wish to train myself to touch type I have first to accept that right now there is not the ability to touch type; and only then can the effort be honestly made to learn to train the fingers and the eyes to work together in an automatic way. If I am unwilling to accept the fact that right now there is not the ability and yet I wish to touch type then I can pretend, but the only person I will be really fooling is myself. We do this on a grand scale when we would like to be mature and fulfilled people and we are unable to accept the limitations we find ourselves with. We can then pretend to be mature when we are in fact not really clear about our emotions or intentions and allow ourselves to be motivated by immature and damaging emotions. In the case of touch typing there is no real harm done; in the case of the person pretending to themselves and others that they are grown up, it is more dangerous both for themselves and others.

The four Brahma Viharas work together. Ajahn Buddhadasa talked in terms of upekkha overseeing the other three. In skilful and beautiful situations mudita is the mature motivation of the heart. If it is possible to alleviate a situation where there is pain or distress compassion maybe invoked. An unpleasant or ugly situation invokes metta. Acceptance, an aspect of metta, finds its echo in the acceptance of limitation implied in upekkha, which is why metta is such an important beginning.

For most of us and even in animals it is metta, as found in the acceptance of the mother of the child, that is the first emotion that allows us, and others, to grow and begin to mature. If there is no metta expressed to an offspring, particularly a human child, it will either die quickly or grow to be a very warped and immature individual. It is the primary motivation that allows the very young to mature. The young express it in the way they reach out and learn about the place in which they find themselves. Young children can pick up things without discrimination and, to the horror of the adults, place them in the mouth. There is in this action of the child a very crude level of acceptance and lack of discrimination operating as the child begins to reach out beyond itself.

Compassion allows us to recognise the changes and developments that are a part of the natural changes from baby, to child, to young person, to adult, to old person - and the pain of separation from the known, which is part of this process - and bear the changes sensitively.

Mudita allows us to enjoy life. The beauty and the wonder of this strange experience of being a sensitive separate life somehow mysteriously connected with it all. And when all the fear of the unknown has been allowed to fall away, the wonder of the unknowable can be appreciated and enjoyed.

What moves us through life, through the uncertainties and changes is what can bring some freedom for people. Our intentions move us through life, our intentions are the area of our greatest freedom. To use and train this freedom wisely is the challenge.



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## Cambodia's Nobel Nominee

*Maha Ghosananda, Cambodia's spiritual leader, talks to Alan Channer about peace, suffering and trees.*

I first met Maha Ghosananda, the Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia, on a hot afternoon in Phnom Penh. As I peered round the door of his residence he emerged from the bathroom, water dripping from his hands. I was unannounced, a stranger. He bowed, smiled and invited me in.

Until the UN - organised elections last year his country had known little but war and destruction for some 23 years. During that time thousands of Maha Ghosananda's fellow monks had died or fled. His efforts to bring healing to such a damaged nation have earned him a nomination for the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize.

In Cambodia they say that Maha Ghosananda is a true monk. "He will give his daily meal to someone who needs it more." He walks around with a latent smile in his eyes which bursts, at times, into infectious chuckles and downright hilarity. He seems to have his interior life so sorted out that he can give the whole of his mind to compassion for the person in front of him.

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We have great compassion for them, because they do not know the truth. They destroy Buddhism-they destroy themselves.

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A few days later I was sitting on the tiled floor opposite the beaming patriarch whose name means "great joyful proclaimer". I asked what had led him to become a monk. "It is the custom in Cambodia", he said, as if leading the celibate, penniless life was the most obvious option in the world. He went on to explain that bhikkhu (the word for monk) can be translated as 'beggar'.

"Do you see yourself as a beggar?" I interjected.

He laughed. "Yes!" he said, laughing more, "Special beggar!"

Recalling it now I'm coming up in goose pimples and confusion. From where does he get that serenity? Cambodia, after all, has not been conducive to peace of mind. It has more unexploded land mines than people, more amputees per person than any other country. An estimated three million Cambodians have been executed, killed in war or died of malnutrition and overwork during the last quarter century.

Had his family suffered under the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot?

"Yes," he said.

I probed further.

"All of them are dead."

It didn't quite impinge. "Your parents?"

"Yes."

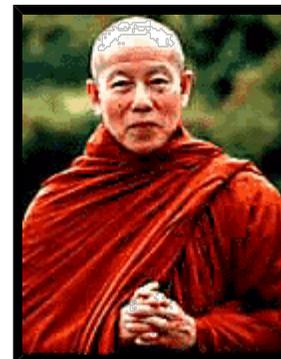
"Your brothers and sisters?"

"Yes."

Maha Ghosananda was studying meditation in a forest in Thailand when the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh 17 April, 1975. Every day he listened to news from Cambodia on the radio, and was beset by anguish. His meditation master advised him to concentrate on his spiritual practice - to foster peace within his own heart - and to wait for the right time to return to his people.

The Khmer Rouge set about creating a classless, agrarian society purified of all traces of 'feudal institutions' and Western influence. Officials of the previous government, ethnic minorities, monks and nuns, classical dancers, artists and anyone who had received a formal education were singled out for execution. The Buddhist monasteries were not only closed but desecrated. Statues of the Buddha were smashed, beheaded and used for target practice. Ancient scriptures were burned or used as cigarette paper. What, I asked, was Maha Ghosananda's attitude to those who had tried to destroy his religion. He looked down and spoke quietly: "We have great compassion for them, because they do not know the truth. They destroy Buddhism-they destroy themselves." He was absolutely free of bitterness. It was an extraordinary moment.

I later heard that Maha Ghosananda had been asked by another foreign journalist how a message of peace and compassion could ever be brought to Pol Pot. Foreign journalists were always asking about Pol Pot, Maha Ghosananda had replied. He suggested that the journalist could start by increasing the peace and compassion in his own heart.



By 1978 the time had come for Maha Ghosananda to help his people. The 'walking skeletons', as they were called at the time, who had survived the killing fields were streaming across the border into refugee camps in Thailand. Maha Ghosananda went to set up Buddhist temples in the camps. And as he walked among the refugees he would offer each one, with a bow of his head, a piece of paper with the teaching of the Buddha:

*Hatred is not overcome by hatred; hatred is overcome by love. This is a law eternal.*

In 1979 the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, and the Khmer Rouge and their families were themselves forced to set up refugee camps on the Thai border. Maha Ghosananda went there too, spreading the Buddha's teaching of love and forgiveness. Thousands wept. Recalling the plight of the refugees, he told me, "They suffer so much; they burn themselves. They want peace; they want happiness, and Buddhism gives them peace and happiness."

The fact that Maha Ghosananda had taken Christ's teaching, 'Love thine enemy', further than any Christian I had ever heard of, put me in awe. I found my own inner conflicts and fears dissolving. I ventured to continue by asking how ordinary people like me could become a peace-maker.

"Just take care of yourself," he said. "Just love yourself. Be compassionate with yourself. Then you are a peace-maker. Peace begins with you."

I was taken aback. He sat there blinking peacefully. "If I love myself I may want to take

something from somebody else," I said. "If you love yourself in the truth," he replied, "you do not take things from other people. Stealing makes you unhappy and it makes other people unhappy."

He went on to list the five moral precepts of Buddhism - refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and taking intoxicants. He seemed to see these as guidelines for both the love of oneself and the love of others. As a Christian, I couldn't help making comparisons with my own faith-the moral principles were remarkably similar; the theology very different. I asked if he saw religious differences as a source of conflict. He replied, "If they know the truth there is no conflict," and looked towards his Jesuit friend, Bob Maat, who was sitting on the floor in the far corner of the room. "Like our friend with Christ here - there is no conflict!" The patriarch then pointed to the bookshelf and said, "All these belong to him. We have many books about Christ now."

What was Maat's perspective? The blond American referred to Gandhi's advice that when you study someone else's religion you learn more about your own. "That has been a lived experience for me," he said. "I have learned so much about what it means to be Christian, Catholic and Jesuit from Buddhist friends. Maha Ghosananda said, 'If you want to work for peace in my country, come follow me.' He didn't tell me what to do, how to do it, what to be, how to act as a Catholic. He just said, 'Come walk with me.'"

Maat, like hundreds of Buddhist monks, nuns and laypeople, has followed Maha Ghosananda on peace marches throughout the Cambodian countryside during the last two years. "People would sit along the road," he recalled, "with a bucket of water and an incense stick - this would be at three or four in the morning when we would begin the walks. And everyone would bless each person with water, would wish them peace in their own heart, peace in the country. And people would just weep, especially old people. It really showed me you can destroy all the temples, you can take every sign and symbol of a religion away from a people, but you can't take it out of the human heart."

Maat recalled an incident when some of the peace marchers were caught in crossfire between Khmer Rouge guerillas and government soldiers, while they were resting in a village monastery. Everyone lay flat on the floor except Maha Ghosananda, who sat in meditation. A grenade came through the window, landed in front of the statue of the Buddha and failed to explode. Maha Ghosananda said, "The Buddha saved us!"

Earlier this year, King Sihanouk appointed Maha Ghosananda as his special representative for protection of the environment, and the importance of tree-planting and forest conservation is one of the more worldly subjects on which Maha Ghosananda is ready to expound. At the press conference following his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, someone asked whether advocating tree-planting was compatible with the other-worldly calling of a Buddhist monk. Maha Ghosananda replied that the Buddha was born under a tree, found enlightenment under a tree and passed away under a tree.

One afternoon I accompanied Maha Ghosananda on a visit to a village on the banks of the Bassac river, about 40 miles south of Phnom Penh. After eating a large lunch and drinking several coconuts, everyone retired for a siesta. When I woke, I stumbled, bleary-eyed, down the narrow passage towards the toilet. Suddenly the door of Maha Ghosananda's room opened, but before I could even think of making way, he said, "You go first." In Buddhist thought, enlightenment arises as the ego dissolves. Self-centered motivation is replaced by four qualities: loving-kindness, compassion, delight in the well-being of others and serenity. Maha Ghosananda provides a living example that peace and goodness can be born out of conflict and suffering. Whether or not he is awarded the Nobel Prize, nothing will deflect him from recalling his fellow Cambodians to their spiritual heritage. On how far he succeeds may

depend on Cambodia's hopes for a peaceful future.

*Reprinted, with permission, from 'For a Change', Oct.1994*



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## No Ease in the Isahn

*Ven. Natthiko Bhikkhu is a monk of Swedish nationality who spent his second pansah (rains-retreat), at a branch monastery in the Isahn - North-East Thailand. He sent this letter to the Sangha at Wat Pah Nanachat.*

Venerable Elders And Fellow Wayfarers,

I hope this letter reaches you all in good health and on the path. As you know, I am staying at Wat Pah Kor Chareun Tham, the Forest Monastery with the Ceylon Oaks; its name means 'Where the Dhamma Prospers' or something like that. The abbot is Ajahn Banjong, (23 pansahs), he has been abbot here for twenty years. He is in utter control. It's a small pace 80 rai [a little over 30 acres -ed.], the beautiful old Ceylon Oaks give high-roofed shade in the sala area and over most kutis. It's quiet except for the chickens, dogs, pakhows [ anagarikas - ed.], novices, the brick factory, detonations from the dam nearby and the odd landmine exploding in the hills bordering Cambodia.

The Sangha consists of 10-12 monks, 3-4 novices, and a few pakhows, most of whom will take ordination for the pansah. The first three monks down from Ajahn Banjong are tudong-ers from Wat Keuan; Ajahn Tawee-Sin, Ajahn Pitaya and Ajahn Vinaya. I know some of you know them. Then it's all local sons of the land; none older than three pansahs or 25 years of age; five of us with one pansah.

The routine varies little: a morning sit at 3:00 am, chanting at 4, pindabaht [alms round -ed], the meal around 8, chores at 2:30 or 3:00 pm, evening sit at 5, chanting at 6, drinks and desana [talk or exhortation by the abbot - ed] from 7:00 to 8:30 or so. Not a lot of solo time. An hour of walking meditation after the meal, before the evening sit and after drinks is expected. There's quite a lot of 'gung-ho' energy around, for better and for worse. Good group momentum; everybody is virtually always present and on time for the meetings, any instructions on practice from the Ajahn are promptly carried out, a good deal of effort is put in in general.

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disenchantment.

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Several monks do the sitter's practice[@], the three-robos practice[&] (plus an angsa and a bathing cloth) and everybody usually makes it through Wan Phra[#]. Most monks are ferocious workers. I feel like a lost old man at chores. (At most times actually.) A clear majority of the monks confess to be sense-desire types and believe that hard labor will reduce lust. Almost all say they have serious doubts about whether they will stay in robes, which surprises me.

Pindabaht is a long haul, most routes are around two hours. Almsfood is good, it's a fairly prosperous area. A modest kitchen supplies some extra dishes. All curries are put into one big pot, so if you have anything against grey porridge with buffalo fat and rotten fish you're out of luck. There is usually plenty of eggs, fruits, greens and sweets though. Drinks are O.K.; a cup of coffee on Wan Phra, standard mattoom-hibiscus-tamarind-boropet[\$] fare. No cocoa or tea usually. So much for a general outline.

As for my personal experience, I've found it quite hard to fit in. I've felt a bit like I'm from another planet all along. When I arrived in January it took a couple of weeks before Ajahn Banjong let me take dependence, for various reasons. Meanwhile he had great fun (he always has) as soon as he'd see me he'd break out in a farang accent 'Natthiko hoti asamvaso' (Natthiko is no longer in communion[%]). And of course his monks soon started imitating him. Everybody had great fun except me. Quite funny actually.

Then there's the language. The Lao here is as thick as yoghurt. A monosyllabic language, where they habitually swallow the last syllable of every word, is no picnic. None of the monks have been to university. The most cosmopolitan one spent some months working in Bangkok. He speaks decent Thai. The others sound very Isahn when they speak Thai.

The Ajahn speaks good Thai but we still haven't really connected, although he's been great when I've been ill. They're building a bot [chapter-house -ed] here and on one of the occasions when the monks helped out the bamboo scaffolding broke under me while I was painting. I landed fairly bruised and with my shoulder dislocated. I was also totally exposing my private parts. Now, one of the things I've found hardest to understand is their habit of laughing as soon as you make a mistake by body or speech or the situation gets tense. And here I was, sore and bleeding on the concrete floor with intense pain in the shoulder and the entire Sangha is laughing their heads off. Great practice.

Lately we have been working a lot; 2-6 hours a day. First building a shelter for leftover wood, then cementing the new bot floor and asana (monks' sitting platform - ed.). They reinforce the cement with a bamboo lattice work here rather than steel, so it has involved a lot of cutting bamboo with machetes. On a good day it takes about an hour before I cut myself with those big knives, on a bad day it's almost instant. It became a daily highlight to see how long it takes before Natthiko-Hoti-Asamvaso is off to the medical cabinet.

All this work is exhausting some days. One evening sitting after a long day's work I was overwhelmed by sleepiness and just fell asleep with a broken neck and bent back. I didn't even wake up at the bell. It was a hilarious situation; me slowly coming to life while they all waited to start chanting. The monks know how sensitive I've become here to being laughed at, but a novice or two couldn't restrain themselves and soon most of the Sangha was roaring with laughter, including the Ajahn. It was so bad it was good.

Ajahn Banjong puts great emphasis on wakefulness. throughout pansah matchbox hats are part of the morning meeting dress-code[^]. Lose it twice (for monks) or thrice



(for others) and you only eat sticky rice that day. Some mornings, it sounds like somebody is playing maracas in the sala.

The acariyavattha[\*] is fairly well kept here. Like most things it's unrefined but adequate. A bit of dirt in the corner is no big deal. Ajahn Banjong makes a point of being easy to please. Most monks have better equipment than he does. They all think he is attained and are very respectful. He does command a lot of respect quite naturally; I've never seen him even slightly irritated or impatient. There is a zen-like deliberateness about everything he does. He gives 60- 90 minute desanas every night in thick Lao. The monks cherish them. The usual forest tradition subjects , but he is very thorough and very funny. He is a great impersonator; among his classic caricatures are the submissive but mischievous village housewife and a drawling and nasal Ajahn Jagaro. Ajahn Banjong gives his talks from a traditional wooden sofa while we sit in a row on the floor (to more fully experience the begging dogs' bad breath) He gets into some postures so casual they make Luang Por Leeam seem uptight. He often talks in terms of attainment and stresses disenchantment. He makes a clear distinction between 'sotas, sakyas , anagas' ( his expressions) and 'Phra Araham'[+].

The laity treat him with great deference. He is big on blessing vehicles, so often people come with their new truck or motorcycle and he does a small ceremony. When we go for invitations the holy water left over from the mahakaruniko [great compassion -ed] chant is usually sprinkled on all the vehicles by somebody.

Almost no laypeople come here once the meal is over. My kuti is next to the Ajahn's and he does formal practice usually at least 6-7 hours a day, not including any practice he might do when the lights are out. He is endowed with strong but unassuming metta. Always observant as to the problems and tensions among the monks and quick to help out when he can. Although he makes fun of at least a couple of monks or novices almost every evening in his desanas, nobody ever seems to take offence. The monks even save his hair shavings, expecting them to turn into relics.

As for requisites, it's the kind of place where you feel decadent about having a torch. Most monks don't even use them because there are never any batteries around anyway. Usually no candles or incense either. Kerosene lamps are used. They don't make any bowl-stands or glots[~], very few know how to use the sewing machine to put a patch on a robe. I still haven't seen anyone sewing a robe or an angsa.

The only real reservation I have about the way of practice here is 'chattiness.' Ajahn Banjong is very chatty when around people. He just seems to be very witty and at ease talking. Unfortunately many monks emulate him, but without his sati [mindfulness -ed]. So it is very seldom quiet if there's more than one person around. During work, before almsround, before the meal, before the evening meeting, before and after drinks, throughout the day, there is joking and chatting. Noise in general doesn't seem to be perceived as a problem. While the monks do Patimokkha on the asana there is usually a novice around slamming kettles in the sala or a couple playing in the kitchen next door. The two beloved (by everyone but me) monastery dogs will be lying on the floor next on the asana during sittings, doing all the sounds dogs do.

There has been some letting go around those dogs for me. The monks feed them on the asana during the meal. I was never big on dogs, especially not in my bowl lid during the meal. But slowly I've developed something between stoicism and indifference from an initial position that was close to rabid. The ultimate test was feeding them myself from the asana. So one day I took a half-eaten fish and laid it down on the asana. The older dog came and gulped it down, leaving some dog saliva gleaming on the concrete. Now, I once had a girlfriend whose family

had a boxer, one of those dogs with compressed faces only English people like. It always had a long string of spittle dangling from one corner of its mouth. You had to be very careful not to be in the way when it decided to turn or swing its head. Astonishingly enough, her family didn't find this utterly repulsive. After a few clots on my trouser leg I was close to switching girlfriends. So, I don't like dog spittle. I had great difficulty finishing the meal that day with those glistening droplets occupying about 90% of my field of vision, and about 98% of my mind space. Ajahn Chah, as usual, put it succinctly: "life as a monk is 90% trying to let go but not being able to."

As for the language, its very slow going. Isahn is still pretty much a solid wall of sound; whereas in Thai I can have a slow, basic and tedious conversation if the other person is very articulate, patient and polite. I'm sure all these humbling experiences are good for me, but something non-humbling sometimes would make a welcome change of diet.

As for the Sangha, there are a lot of good people around. Nobody seems overly averse toward me and many put in quite touching efforts to make me feel a home. The young pakhows and novices are just like average, insecure, giggling, restless and noisy teenagers anywhere. The Wat Keuan monks are a continuous source of inspiration. With their farang experience they explain some of our idiosyncrasies to the rest of the Sangha. They also happen to be very kind and ardent monks, with impeccable vinaya and attendance to duties. The effect a few good monks on the upper end of the asana can have on the rest is beautiful to behold. Two brothers in the local Sangha are thoroughbred 'Buddha-nature' types. Soft spoken and considerate, even-tempered, always doing the right thing; they seem very into formal practice. Practice is luckily the favourite topic of the monks here, especially defilements. Everybody knows how many hours everybody else sleeps and practises during night and day. The Ajahn often goes down the line in his talks and asks everybody about some particular aspect of practice. The day after Wan Phra there is usually someone asking if you made it through the night. If you didn't, no cookies and Ovaltine before pindabaht. People's weak spots in food, drink and women are public goods.

The twice daily chanting can be quite oppressive. The monk on my left has a congenital problem with his throat, but he's very enthusiastic, so he's in a loud permanent monotone. The monk on my right is fiercely competitive and knows every syllable in the chanting book. He has an unsettling habit of sneering, snickering and chuckling as soon as I make a small mistake or nod off.

So, all in all, a good place for practice. I have, however, felt a need for a bit of solitude before pansah, so now I'm spending a month or two at a new branch monastery of Wat Pah Kor. It's one of those forest wats without a forest. But a laity endowed with great faith is planting trees almost every day, building kutis and taking very good care of the monks. I just wish they wouldn't die so often. Two deaths in the last week has meant seven or eight chanting occasions.

There is a very pleasant and mature atmosphere among the monks here; a Sangha in concord. The absence of pakhows and novices makes life a bit less exciting but more peaceful. I feel it's doing me a lot of good.

Out here in the backwaters of the beyond one really appreciates the value of Sangha. Kalayanmittas are truly precious: that becomes painfully obvious when there's none around that one can really communicate with. Having gone forth into homelessness, Wat Pah Nanachat has paradoxically become the first place where I have ever felt "I belong here."

Well, well, its time to wrap up. The sheer joy of being understood had made this a very long letter. Summing up regarding my difficulties here; some progress is being made. I don't dig

the pits of dukkha for myself fully as deep or as often as before. Mindfulness doesn't always go on a holiday when things get tough, leaving the house in the lethal care of arrogant opinions. And the language barrier prevents almost all wrong speech, which has been a great protection for me. So I know it's good for me - it hurts in all the right places.

Footnotes:

[@] Sitter's practice - to refrain from lying down (day or night), generally for at least a few months.

[&] Three-robos practice - to have no extra robes than the one set of lower robe, upper robe and double thick outer robe.

[#] Wan Phra - i.e. they encourage to complete the all-night meditation vigil of the lunar observance day.

[\$] Mattoom is a sweetish tuberous fruit, boropet a very bitter vine.

[%] A word play on 'parajiko hoti asamvaso', the statement in the Patimokkha that indicates that a bhikkhu has fallen into one of the four Defeat offences which entail immediate expulsion from the order.

[^] i.e. sitting in meditation with a matchbox on the head; a means of encouraging vigilance as to posture. Hence the 'maracas': the sound of the boxes hitting the floor.

[\*] Duty of attending to the teacher.

[+] i.e. sotapanna [stream enterer], sakadagami [once returner] anagami [non-returner] and arahant.

[~] Mosquito-net umbrella - the standard 'tent' used by tudong bhikkhus.



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## Dhamma for the Young

*Venerable Kusalo, himself a father for thirteen years, looks at various ideas in relation to offering the ideals of Buddhism to younger people and draws some parallels between these ideals and parenting.*

I have been involved in teaching children in New Zealand for some years now and, having recently arrived here in the U.K., am quite keen to get involved in new ideas and activities. As a monk I enjoy living in community, and in this article I would like to put forward some ideas on community-family-teacher-parent-child relationships, then invite you to contact me suggesting ways to support, extend, or modify these ideas around some form of a "Buddhist children's collective". The vision is still a bit vague but will gain definition with time and interest.

I regard education, in the general sense, as the equipping of a being for their passage through life. I usually work on the basis that most of our behaviour is learned behaviour, and that the quality of what we learn determines how well we function in the world, i.e. the quality of our lives. Essentially, it is the environment we are exposed to that determines our perceptions of right and wrong and our value judgments of what is worth fighting for (and against). As parents, and to a much lesser degree as children, there is some choice over this ongoing exposure.

Education, in the specific sense of a systematic exposure to selected instruction, has a value which hopefully needs no selling. An education, these days, ought to be everyone's right by birth rather than by privilege. What does require some thought however is the nature of the instruction that we select. This is, in effect, the environment, or the material that we choose to expose ourselves to. What choices do you consciously, or unconsciously, make? Unfortunately we often just have to jump in the deep end of a 'life experiment' to ascertain the validity of our choice. However, although "tried" can't always be followed by "and true", most traditional standards are considered eligible for this pairing - with good reason.

For the past five years I have consciously been jumping into the life experiment of Theravadin monasticism. Most of the principles that guide this life constitute an excellent framework around which a harmonious society can be built. Their essence is found summarised in the Five Precepts: non-killing (harmlessness), non-stealing (generosity), non-adultery (fidelity), non-lying (honesty) and non-intoxication (sobriety). They can be regarded as a minimum standard for human behaviour, anything less being merely animal. If you add to these the four Brahma Viharas (divine abidings) of metta (loving-kindness), karuna (compassion) mudita (sympathetic joy) and upekkha (equanimity) you have the basic, Buddhist social and moral platform. The Three Refuges of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha defines the spiritual dimension.

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"Craving is the cause of dukkha (suffering) and  
abstinence from craving is freedom from suffering."

## Simple, huh? Now why can't I do that?

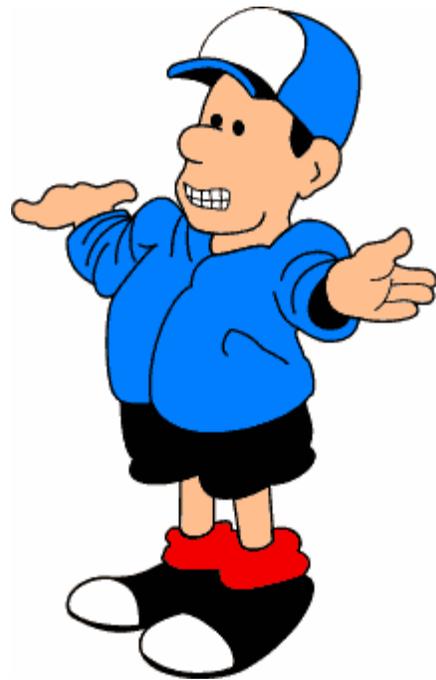
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I am not that well read in modern child psychology and have generally formed ideas from my own years as a parent and from just observing the parents and the environments of 'good' kids. By 'good' I mean; they are basically happy and content. They don't whinge a lot; they respect their parents' direction and are polite to others. You will have your own criteria, but one way of achieving a clear definition is by contemplating its opposite. This, for me, would be the precocious child; the child that forgets, or is allowed to forget, its relationship to others. One of the basic refrains I carry from my childhood is "Equal responsibilities equals equal rights"; when I pay for the groceries, I get to choose the flavour of the ice-cream, unless I have contributed in some other, usually small, way to the fabric of the household.

Monastic life has a very clear hierarchy and there is a relaxed comfort in being able to function, in a group, from a "knowing of one's place." I have lived many years of my (past) life in hedonistic, egalitarian anarchy and, although there were other factors, I see that an excess of independence, so-called freedom, generally only led me to alienation, isolation and depression. Human beings are social beings and, although they are individuals, they are not independent. Several principles are implied here in relation to producing well-balanced, socially integrated kids through education. One of the central elements is humility, being the foundation of courtesy, cooperation, tolerance and harmony in all forms of communion. It should go without saying that these principles will only be adopted if the one propounding them is also embodying them.

The Buddha's teaching, certainly as I encounter it, both as a doctrine and a lifestyle, turns around modesty. I like to use this word as an 'accessible', day-to-day synonym for renunciation. It includes humility, moderation, gentleness, control, restraint, abstinence... The fundamental teaching of The four Noble Truths has: "Craving is the cause of dukkha (suffering) and abstinence from craving is freedom from suffering." Simple, huh? Now why can't I do that? Fortunately it's not totally either/or, and inclining to modesty is an inclination toward that same freedom from suffering. As a teacher of your children do you incline to a modest lifestyle; or is it merely "simple" because you can't afford more? Is your behaviour an example of modesty to your children? Are we encouraged toward modesty by the world? My thesaurus gives the antonym of modesty as 'ostentation' = demonstration, display, parade, exhibitionism, splendour etc. Somehow these seem to be the values I encounter when I read a magazine or billboard or watch television. Advertising now offers the product as itself, plus. Get the candy bar (with 10% extra, free). The packet soup with a bonus holiday; the petrol with free discount vouchers, etc., etc. ad delirium. These things never come for free! I am led to believe that life as it is, here, normal, right now, can't be satisfactory as surely, somewhere else, it's on special. This is the sort of 'educational' material I see myself having to work against. Most people agree the world is a bit of a rat-race - but don't we all find it so difficult to stop running?

A simple, modest, regulated lifestyle is an excellent place to start stopping. How you translate that into your life only



you can determine; but, the less you need, desire, the less you have to pay for, the less you have to earn, and the less complex your whole infrastructure can become. All of this converts into one single, vital factor - **TIME!**

To a modest lifestyle I would add 'attention'; in the context of giving attention, rather than asking them (the children) to pay attention. The greatest gift you can offer anyone - and in this case we are particularly talking about children - is your time. A piece of your life, no matter how small, if given unconditionally is worth any number of new toys, violin lessons, sweets, etc. Although it is your time given that gets the money that gets the toys, children have no real appreciation of this equation.

A simple example to test this idea: in bed, before sleep, take the time to give your body a little attention. Gently massage the face, the neck muscles, the scalp. Rub the arms, massage the chest, give the heart a good rub till you feel heat on the skin, the belly - gently feel each organ under the skin. This whole process can be quite extensive but even five minutes will, hopefully, leave your body feeling happy, a kind of soft glow. Kids' bodies, all bodies, really enjoy being touched, attended to. Our minds/hearts are no different, although the process of giving attention is more complex. Meditation is an important aspect of self-attending that has beneficial results (unfortunately details are outside the scope of this work). In class I try and touch the children verbally, with praise, affirmation, encouragement and interest. To touch emotionally, with love, is a joy. In the absence of any positive touch, children often use misbehaviour, having learned that this will get attention. Although only negative it is still preferred to no attention at all.

While I appreciate the unfortunate busy-ness modern life demands, if these kind of ideas aren't seriously upheld they will never find a footing. If there is no model for stopping, physically and emotionally, the insistent, demanding voices of production and consumption are difficult to subdue, leaving no room for the spiritual.

Related to attention, and as equally important as 'being present' and hugs, is discipline. Unfortunately, if we see praise as the positive, then discipline is the negative. It means order and control; however, for children, it is your sense of order and your control over them, and

they know better. If the boundaries of their allowable behaviour are clearly defined early in life, and regularly reinforced, they are generally much happier; knowing where they stand, and how far they can go. Self-discipline is something we learn; usually by being shown discipline being applied (often to ourselves). If the application is effective we have a good model of how discipline is applied to another and we can apply that to ourselves.

And how to determine what is just? How to treat kids fairly? There are increasing signs of social disorder and a lack of control. Teachers increasingly function as social workers and are often no more than disciplinarians. How is order to be maintained in group situations? Personally, I think society has a generally over-liberal approach to discipline. Children don't know right from wrong. They build up a list of likes and dislikes which usually bears little resemblance to any moral code and often is outside many social codes. The penalties, later in life, for not having been taught, are not only uncomfortable for the individual but for the society at large.

Reasoned logic, coming from loving parents who embody the values they are trying to instill, is preferable to physical punishment by far; if there is an ear ready to listen. This is not always so and I think it naive to rule out "smacking". Discipline is a delicate balance between abuse and indulgence.

One large obstacle to discipline we all have is the desire to be loved. I have heard children say to a parent "I'll hate you forever if you . . . (discipline me)." Fear of rejection immediately arises and has to be weighed against the principle involved. Don't be afraid to discipline, don't be intimidated into coercive 'negotiation'. Your children will always love you, although it may not always appear that way. The long-term rewards far exceed short-term expediency.

The last area I would like to reflect on is 'tradition', which includes symbols, ritual and ceremony. In an age of reason, everything must be logical, practical and utilitarian. Unfortunately the human organism isn't exactly any of those things. It does a pretty good job but, the difficulty is that we are dealing here with a non-standard entity, and this is the problem - trying to set a standard. Children are very susceptible to worldly symbols - that brand of jeans is totally cool (and so will I be if I have . . . ). But they also intuitively respond to religious symbols, particularly when they have an (emotional) association with pleasant ritual or ceremony. Lighting candles, the sprinkling of holy water, the smell of incense, seems to touch something basically simple and pure in all of us.

Rituals have a constancy and order that similarly appeal. The ritual cup of tea, the ritual greeting, the ritual bed-time story; all provide a familiarity that we find comforting. It is healthy for children to feel secure. Saying grace at meals is a worthy tradition; gratitude for the provisions and providers. Bowing is another. If you, or your children, don't already have one, set up a shrine and get the kids to put on it the things that they treasure, that they can bow to - and join them in bowing. Create some special time of ritual, create some special form of ritual; if you believe in it then it can work, especially with younger ones. I have lovely memories of many non-religious family rituals - the principle is the same even if the focus is a little different.

Hopefully these short reflections on modesty, attention, discipline and tradition are of some interest.

In the monastery there is the small, but healthy, core of several children's activities - Sunday School, Summer Camp and a regular magazine. I would like to offer these to a wider population, and, in conjunction with this, invite wider contribution, cooperation and participation. I feel there are not enough Dhamma opportunities available for younger people and I would like to make contact with

new ideas, and new (or old) people who have an interest in 'educating' children in a Buddhist context. If you are part of a group, or an individual, with or without children, and would like to connect with a broader sphere then I would love to hear from you. The idea of the global village is a bit beyond what I have in mind but this is an attempt at non- separateness, non-isolation.

One idea that I am very keen on is resource sharing. Having encountered a lack of off-the- shelf material I have put time into creating my own. I suspect that there are many others (planet-wide) doing the same thing. Is it too idealistic to suggest that these efforts can be coordinated and made generally available? Otherwise how many hours are spent on one-offs? Songs, poetry, stories, plays, games, art work, craft, etc. can be collated/catalogued and presented in a regular publication. Several forms of exchange: videos, computer disks, pen-pals, holidays, between individuals and groups, are also possible. There are many possibilities.

If you have any interest or ideas please get in touch with me at Amaravati; I am happy to help facilitate.



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## Giving in to the Deathless

*Venerable Sobhano reflects on the significance of the first Upasika precept ceremony held at Amaravati on October 15th 1994*

From the outside it could have appeared like an ordinary enough occasion. Just another precept ceremony, forty or so lay people sitting in the sala requesting the precepts from Luang Por Sumedho. But there were one or two unusual features. For one thing it was in the afternoon. For another, it wasn't Kathina.

Everyone present had been invited to bring offerings of candles, flowers and incense, and to offer them to Luang Por before asking individually to take the three refuges and five precepts, spoken with a great deal of emotion, or with boldness, caution or grace.

This was in fact the first formal ceremony at Amaravati of the newly formed Upasika Training Community. This is comprised of lay people who want to formalise their affiliation with the Forest Sangha, and to commit themselves to a regular system of training within the lay life under the guidance of the Sangha. It was a touching ceremony to observe: all forty repeating in sonorous, well-practised tones the familiar precept recitation in Pali. Perhaps it was because of the simplicity and naturalness of the ceremony, belying the seriousness of its intent, that it seemed to evoke so many memories and reflections of the short history of our community here at Amaravati.

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Luang Por's constant reminder that to seek perfection via new management structures, interpersonal group dynamics, non-hierarchical decision making processes, etc. etc., was delusion.

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Amaravati was launched ten years ago with the intention of offering facilities for the study and practice of Dhamma. It was to be a Buddhist centre for all; including a Retreat Centre, a residence for the growing ordained women's community, and accommodation for the increasing number of lay people wishing to taste the monastic lifestyle. And it was close to London. It spawned a whole host of additional projects that couldn't have been conceived of before the Sangha's arrival - including the library, family camps and publication resources.

In the last few years however the community has been going through a period of introspection. How could we sustain the level of teaching and services that we offered to the lay community as well as provide a balance of quiet seclusion for the monastic community? The Sangha had stretched itself to maintain a high standard of Dhamma teachings, both in response to the interest shown and out of gratitude to those who have continually supported us with the requisites for our well-being.

We realised that we needed to step back a pace or two in order to get the internal rhythms of the community 'right'. And there was the Catch 22, how could we achieve this when there was so much to do? Just keeping a monastery this size clean and tidy was a major achievement. Luang Por's constant reminder that to seek perfection via new management structures, interpersonal group dynamics, non-hierarchical decision making processes, etc. etc., was delusion. The very idea that there was something 'wrong' out there was what we needed to see. So we let go. With a refreshed perspective we begin to realise that within the tradition itself there is provision for the management and cooperation of the lay and monastic community - the Fourfold Sangha.

Very tentatively we are beginning to witness that, to the extent that we let go of our involvement in the running of Amaravati, we are simultaneously creating opportunities for the lay community to get involved. The arrival of Ajahn Viradhammo has provided a timely catalyst to move us a step further in this direction, with his firm but gentle leadership.

The Upasika day in October coincided with the last in a series of meetings we had held to establish the Amaravati Support Network. Now we have a smaller steering committee that meets fortnightly to coordinate the seventy, and rising, individual offers of help that we have received since our mail-out last issue. We already have several long-term lay residents who have undertaken to take over some of the areas of responsibility within the monastery - including the kitchen, grounds, library and offices - for a year at a time. And with the foundation of the Upasika training, being developed now by Ajahn Viradhammo, we are seeing the spiritual ties between the lay and monastic communities strengthened.

There was a visible expression of joy from Luang Por Sumedho as he addressed the Upasikas that Saturday in October. Such a demonstration of commitment, to one who has spent the last ten years encouraging the lay community here, was its own reward. There was a sense that Amaravati no longer simply belonged to those that lived here, but to the Fourfold assembly of monks, nuns and male and female Upasikas. The very need for participation in the running of our centre is also giving lay people a much more tangible connection to the Triple Gem that we had so long been providing through the formal teaching situations alone. Through the giving of our time, energy and commitment to Amaravati, we are also giving in to the Deathless.



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## Sutta Class: On being and becoming A Contemplation

"Those in this world with its devas seeing self in what it not self, convinced there is substantiality in form, think "this is true".

But, however they think things are, it is indeed different from that: false to the core, deluding by nature, fleeting, unstable." [*Sutta Nipata 756-7*]

The suttas contain many verses such as this, which may convey a very powerful message very succinctly. The power of the message can be intensified by the concise directness of the verse, and the fact that it might be shorn of context. But although it may be stark and to the point, this can make it difficult to understand. The context in which the verse appears helps one to discern what is being conveyed, however when that context is absent one can have to work quite hard to try and draw out the meaning.

One rather mysterious verse runs:

If it were not, it could not be mine,  
It will not be, it will not be mine.

At first glance this appears to have something to do with ownership. "If it didn't exist, I couldn't own it." Put in the future tense; "It will not exist, I will not be able to own it." On its own it doesn't seem to say very much.

If this verse appeared in just one place in the Sutta Pitaka one would probably think "Hmm! Well, so what?" and pass over it. But it appears in several places and in some of them strong emphasis is placed upon its importance. Here are some of them:

On one occasion Venerable Mahakaccana was sitting near to the Blessed One cross-legged, his body held upright, with mindfulness of body well established within him. The Blessed one, seeing him sitting thus, appreciated the significance of this and declared:

For one in whom always and everywhere mindfulness of body is well established, thus:  
If it were not, it could not be mine, It will not be, so it will not be mine,  
Gradually, in due course, He will overcome craving.'

This is from the Udana [Ud 78], which records instances when the Buddha uttered an inspired verse. Here he was inspired by the diligent practice of Venerable Mahakaccana, one of his foremost disciples. This example gives us no further clue, but we receive the sense that this contemplation is important.

Contemplation of insubstantiality leads to equanimity,  
abandonment of grasping at apparently solid things.

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Another instance occurs at *Samyutta iii 55*, where the Buddha says:

If a bhikkhu had the resolve:  
If it were not, it could not be mine,  
It will not be, so it will not be mine,  
he could cut the lower fetters.

Now this is quite a statement! Cutting through the five lower fetters means being unobstructed by personality view, attachment to rights and rituals, sceptical doubt, sensual desire and ill-will. But what is the significance of the verse? What does it indicate?

The only significant clue the sutta seems to give is that one who sees form, feeling, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness as they really are, as impermanent, insubstantial, not self, also sees them as having come into being - *sankhatam*, and 'coming to not be in the future' - *vibhavissati*.

The key word here is *vibhavissati* - not-being in the future. The Buddha says here that from contemplating the 'non-being' - *vibhava* of form, feeling, etc., the monk could make the resolve:

If it were not, it could not be mine,  
It will not be, so it will not be mine,  
and cut through the lower fetters.

Now this 'non-being' could refer to 'lack of substantiality'. Things appear to be solid, real, stable, persisting over time, but when one examines closely the way in which one experiences 'things', it becomes apparent that no experience is constant, unchanging. As the sutta says above - however one conceives of it, it turns out to be different from that. Things seem to have substance but this is what one 'reads into' the constant stream of changing sensations that make up our experiences.

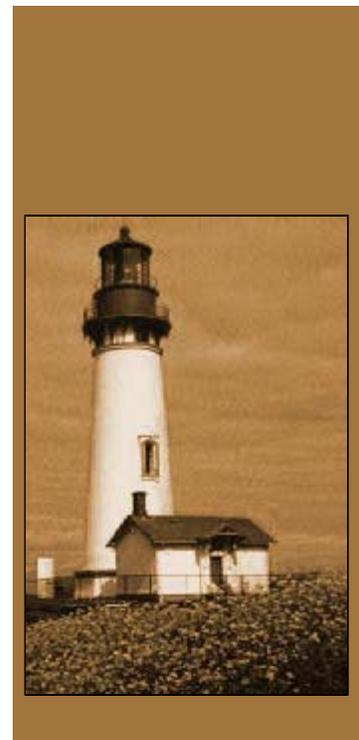
So with this in mind, looking a little further we come to *Anguttara iv 70*, where the Buddha fills out the picture a little more:

If it were not, it could not be mine,  
It will not be, so it will not be mine,  
What is, what has come to be, That I abandon.

With this disposition he gains equanimity. He does not delight in becoming and he does not delight in coming-into-being. He sees with right wisdom an onward peaceful way of progress... (which leads to the wearing out of all fetters).

Contemplation of insubstantiality leads to equanimity,  
abandonment of grasping at apparently solid things.

So this is maybe a way of considering things which cuts through uninspected habitual ways of perceiving. Ordinarily we tend to view the present moment as an experience we are moving through on the way to something better (hopefully) in the future. I feel myself to be a person who is progressing in time, from the past,



through the present and toward the future.

This can be no more than a subtle mood in meditation, at the root of experiencing, the subtle feeling of "me-progressing-towards-something".

Looking closely at the way in which I view my present experience, I notice that the very fact that I'm so concerned about what I am moving towards indicates that I am not content with what simply is the case at present. I'm relating to it in terms of what it is going to become, in the future, for me. I don't want it as it is, I want it to become better, for me. This, no matter how subtle, is none other than craving.

The verse then seems indicate a way of getting to the root of this predicament.

If I want something in the future for me, I am presuming that I will be able to have it, it will last, and it will satisfy me. I assume that when I get it, it will allay the feeling of incompleteness I feel. (This is my real motivation - to stop suffering).

The verse radically undermines these assumptions. The Buddha seems to be saying to us:

Consider: What does not exist, can't be yours - right?

So, if you consider the fact that everything you experience is impermanent then whatever you get in the future will pass away.....right?

So then it won't even be yours then, will it?

So here you are investing your effort in trying to get something that is going to melt away. Is it worth it?

Having considered things like this I may feel rather puzzled. The emotional investment in the view that the future is going to deliver me from suffering, requires that I assume that I can get something lasting in the future. If this assumption gets undermined, my hope must collapse. I'm faced with the realisation that there is nothing worth hoping for. I can imagine what might be, but since I also see that it will let me down, my reaching out for it is frustrated before it starts.

So what am I left with?

Mysteriously, here I still am... or rather here, simply, is 'what is', being experienced as it is, not in terms of what it might become. The feeling of "Me-pursuing-It" has subsided, the stress and tension also have subsided, and there is a curious feeling of equanimous being which is somehow more sufficient unto itself. It doesn't need anything.

The very basis on which desire is predicated - the feeling that there is a 'me' at the centre of experience that is incomplete and will be completed by getting something in the future - this basis is radically undermined by this contemplation.

In this disposition, as the sutta says, there is no delight in becoming, and there is also a sense of non-investment in things being a certain way. One is content to be, and the fact of experiencing seems more important and significant than the content of the experience.

If the foregoing (which is no more than a guess really) is in any way correct, then this innocuous little verse turns out to be a small but precise tool which cuts deep, and does indeed indicate a way in which one can continue and develop, a disposition which can be developed as basis for practice.



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## EDITORIAL

### Jugglers Wanted

Shortly after the end of the Vassa this year, Luang Por Sumedho formally instated Ajahn Viradhammo as the new abbot of Amaravati. This means an allowance for Luang Por to step back from the day-to-day business of Amaravati, and focus more on teaching and travelling for extended periods, without Amaravati being neglected. It also means that there will be an experienced bhikkhu, a mahathera, who can focus on understanding and drawing attention to the needs of the resident community.

It was a little over ten years since the Sangha arrived at Amaravati - in fact Ajahn Viradhammo and myself had been sent in advance to unlock the rooms and tidy up before the main party of monks and nuns, led by Ajahn Sumedho, arrived. A month or so later Ajahn Viradhammo was off to New Zealand and the rest of us were still wandering around this sprawling site wondering what to make of it. We didn't even know whether it was supposed to be a monastery or some hybrid Buddhist Centre with a resident Sangha around its edges. There were plans for a retreat centre, for some lay management structure; perhaps a hospice. It was a place of plans and visions and experimentation.

It still is. A few things such as the Retreat Centre and the Family Camp seem to have established themselves firmly; and some side-effects noted. We found that having a variety of contrasting Dhamma activities occurring within the context of one contemplative community meant that some of the settled homogeneity that is a norm for forest monasteries was sacrificed. That entailed a shift of perspective - the focus of the community had to be attitude and personal mindfulness, above group form. This was not altogether a bad thing - it really opens the door for lay people to participate in the community - but it's easy to get lost in the details of one particular project if mindfulness and attention to form wanes.

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Juggle too fast or too slow - you drop the balls;  
Focus on one ball - you drop the lot!  
To keep the whole thing in a harmonious flow requires  
balance.

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As is the case with all things, creation is one thing, maintenance is another. As buildings get renovated, they have to be cleaned, tidied, and repaired; as functions are established, they have to be staffed and administered. The enthusiasm that accompanies new ideas and projects can tail off when it comes down to keeping it all going. That requires a different kind of attention.

One thing that is needed, as gets said from time to time, is more hands. But not just that. The Sangha has over the years experimented with supervising the place, or having it administered - with the added responsibility of providing some spiritual guidance for the people working here.

At Amaravati, there are frequently more inexperienced newcomers and guests than experienced people. That makes for a greater degree of reliance on the residents to supervise, inform and interact. Suddenly the model of the quiet contemplative with a few simple duties gets an overhauling.

Such effects can condition a loss of balance. The situation is comparable to that of a juggler, who starts off juggling two balls, and gradually builds up to a dozen: it's not more hands he needs, but a balance of attention. Take on more than you can handle, juggle too fast or too slow - and you drop the balls. Focus on one ball at the expense of the rest, or, fail to notice and adjust to the slightly different trajectory of one ball - you drop the lot. To keep the whole thing in a harmonious flow - not too fast, not too slow; to keep the attention over the whole without disregarding the particular - requires balance. That's what the abbot has to specialise in. It helps if we back him up.

Next year, perhaps, the Temple will be constructed. It will be a centre point, a place for establishing balance. Amaravati deserves it as a tenth birthday present; the place has worked hard and served thousands of people. It goes without saying that any help will be appreciated - even if all that is is helping to make the tea for one day. But what we can all do is take a few mindful breaths, wait peacefully when it's time, go willingly when it's time. Most important, we can learn to juggle.

*Ajahn Sucitto*

## SEVEN WHITE BIRDS

Here I am again  
standing on your doorstep  
with a flower in my hand

Tonight everyone in the village  
is drunk  
with moonlight

A white owl glides  
over my head  
What in the world  
can I hold on to

After years of wandering  
I come home  
The egg you hand me  
is still warm

Seven white birds  
come to the pond  
They sing  
a simple song

Between each breath we take

there is a well  
and a dipper

Wind stirs the leaves  
Shadows dance  
over the earth

*Jati Paccaya  
Jaramarana . . .*

. . .

Fat crows crowd the ash trees  
Red leaves wound the mud  
path  
Hansel's bread is gone now  
Tears of rain.

*Vedana Paccaya  
Tanha . . . . .*

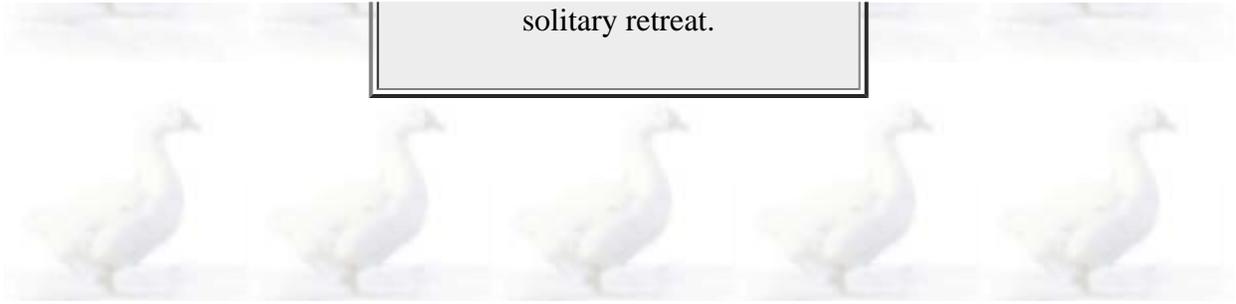
Time  
if only this could last

The time  
always and forever  
What's the time  
is that the time already?

Ajahn Jayasaro

Ajahn Jayasaro is the  
present abbot of Wat  
Pah Nanachat  
(International Forest  
Monastery) in the  
North-east of  
Thailand. The  
foregoing poems  
arose as a result of  
contemplating paticca  
samuppada  
(dependent  
origination) during a

solitary retreat.



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## SIGNS OF CHANGE

### OBITUARY

#### *Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera 20th July 1901 - 19th October 1994*

Shortly after the Vassa ended on 19th October, we received a fax from Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi informing us that his mentor Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera had passed away. Funeral ceremonies would be beginning shortly and the Sangha here were asked to make their contribution with some chanting and a short period of meditation.

Venerable Nyanaponika spent over 58 years in robes, receiving samanera ordination from his fellow ex-patriate German, Venerable Nyantiloka, in Sri Lanka in 1936. He spent most of his 57 rains as a bhikkhu in Sri Lanka, becoming a Sri Lankan citizen in 1950 and settling in Kandy in 1952.

Venerable Nyanaponika was a key figure in bringing Buddha-Dhamma to the West, largely through his many essays and two major books - Abhidhamma Studies and The Heart of Buddhist Meditation - and through founding the Buddhist Publication Society in 1958. This Society has made available to the English-speaking world hundreds of compact low- price books and booklets on every aspect of Theravada Buddhism and still continues to do so under the capable guidance of Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi. The BPS has established the standard for what is the mainstream of thought in Theravada, beginning at a time when there was little else to read but the sutta translations of the Pali Text Society. (Comparisons of their respective translations of the suttas are rewarding and insightful.)

In the last few years of his life, the Venerable Mahathera continued to receive visitors, and was devotedly attended by Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi.

### Dhamma Hall Demolition

#### *Opportunities Abound*

As many of you may already know the old Dhamma Hall at Amaravati is to be demolished, making way for the construction of the new temple. It was decided that, rather than have contractors do this work, the community - both resident and wider - come together for a grand spring 'working bee'. One advantage this has is the selective recycling of the old materials.

For those who have been with the Sangha for a number of years, the memories of well-run, energetic, communal work projects are often amongst the fondest.

The work will start on March 6th and (hopefully) be finished in time for the ground breaking ceremony on May 13th. If you have any spare time between these dates you can be assured that there will be something you can do - teamaker, wall-basher, cook, nail-puller, cheer-leader, etc.

Accommodation will be available in the retreat centre and the monastic schedule will be generally, although often optionally, observed.

To ensure that the work is carried out efficiently the loan of the following tools and equipment would be very useful:

- Chainsaw Trailer
- Block & tackle; winch Hammers (all weights)
- Crowbars (C & std.) Carpenters' aprons
- Jacks (hydraulic?) Scaffolding
- Bolt cutters Hacksaws
- Screwdrivers Parrot's beak
- Portable circular saw Power leads
- Electric sabre saw ICB plugs & sockets



If you intend coming or if you have any of the above available for use during March-April please contact Ian James Tel: 01604 720-508.

## **Dhammapala After Six Years**

### ***Ajahn Tiradhammo offers some reflections on the development on the monastery in Switzerland.***

After more than six years we are able to say that Dhammapala Monastery is well-established and smoothly running.

The early years of getting started in a new country with its particular laws and language, the complexities of finding and purchasing a suitable property and the hard work of transforming a former hotel into a meditation monastery are fortunately now history. The legal procedures are now set up, the location is suitable and the Dhamma is being practised.

The monastery building, an 88 year old classical Bernese Oberland chalet, of course needs continuous maintenance but there are no absolutely pressing projects, unless we decide to undertake the building of an avalanche guard! In the meantime we are gradually proceeding with redecoration of some of the seventeen bedrooms as time and energy allow.

Since this was the first Western forest monastery in a non-English speaking country, we quickly realised that it was important to make available some of the teachings of the forest tradition in other languages. We have thus worked on publishing various booklets and to date have four publications in German and five in French, with several more German publications in various stages of completion.

Our 'leap-of faith' move high up into the Bernese Alps has proved to be very fortuitous. We not only have an excellent place for monastics to live and practise, but it is also greatly appreciated by an increasing number of guests seeking a respite from the stress of hard-working, competitive European society through the practise of meditation in a peaceful environment.

As the glaring heat of summer passes we watch the snowline gradually creep down the mountain Slopes, enveloping us in a soft, silent mantle by mid-November.

Not until next March will we see the green grass of the surrounding meadows as the spring sun gains intensity.

## **Ajahn Santacitto**

It is with some regret that we inform friends and supporters that Ajahn Santacitto has decided to disrobe. Ajahn Santacitto trained for more than a decade in Thailand before coming to Britain in 1984. Since that time he had lived at Amaravati, and was the abbot of the Devon Vihara for five years. His decision to put aside the bhikkhu training after 23 years has been taken for personal reasons and after extensive reflection and consultation with the senior Theras of this community. We wish to express our personal appreciation of his company and support over the years, and our gratitude for his service to the Buddhasasana.

## Sangha Walks - Devon

This years walk, led by Ajahn Subbato, will be in Devon. It will be seven days long, starting from the Devon vihara, climbing up onto Exmoor to join the North Coast path. There will be a return bus to the vihara. The group will be small and camping in out-of-the-way places. You must have had experience of meditation in this tradition and of hill-walking and be able to supply your own equipment (except, possibly, for a tent). There is a fee of GBP60.00 to cover costs.

### **Dates 27th - May 4th June.**

The walk is for men only. It is hoped that a similar walk for women, led by a nun, can arranged this year or next. For more information please write to: Sangha Walks, Mote Hills, Elsdon, Northumberland, NE19 1AB.

## Sangha Gathering

From the 28th February to the 5th March 1995 the monastic communities of the six monasteries in Europe will assemble for the Sangha Gathering at Amaravati.

Following the success of a conference style meeting earlier this year, plans are being made for a slightly down-scaled version in 1995. As well as providing an opportunity for the Sangha to share their various experiences of the holy life, it is hoped that, as last year, there will be a day for the lay community to gather to meet and discuss their role as lay practitioners and supporters of the Sangha. This will occur on Sunday 5th of March. Invitations will be made to those participating in the Upasika and Amaravati Support Network groups associated with Amaravati and other parallel groups in the UK. If you are not involved in any of these groups, but would still like to participate, please let us know by sending on a S.A.E. to the office during the retreat.

