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Practice as Process

From a talk given at Chithurst by Ajahn Pasanno.

One of the things that could be brought up concerns attainment or progress in practice. It's something which we worry about: we talk about it, we get caught up in it in various ways. That's the attitude we have to our progress in practice. Are we progressing? Are we not are we regressing? Are we getting worse at practice, or . . . ? How do we measure our practice?

We spend a lot of time measuring our practice by comparing ourselves to other people. You know: are they more progressed than we are? Are we less progressed? We go around and around with this idea of trying to measure progress or our growth in practice. It's something which we have to investigate and watch, because we go to extremes of getting caught up in trying to decide what is progress; and then going to the other extreme of saying we shouldn't really think about progress, we should just not bother to consider what progress is.

This is one of the things I found when I was travelling through the United States, reading an article on Buddhist practice and finding out that there is less and less emphasis on enlightenment. People don't want to talk about enlightenment any more, because it's daunting to people to think in terms of practice and to think in terms of enlightenment because it seems so far off and remote which means that people are taking more of a worldly standard of what they think practice should be. I think a lot of it relates to the extremes we go to in trying to either measure progress or to avoid the measuring of progress. Hence our confusion as to what practice is and how to relate to practice; or what we consider growth and maturity in practice is. So I'd like to just give some reflections on what the Buddha gave as standards for growth in Dhamma, growth in practice, maturity in practice.

These are a set of four dhammas which are not talked about so much. They are called the four dhammas conducive to growth, to maturity. The first one is coming into contact with a wise being (sappurisa sasevana) - just the contact with someone who's wise. The second one is hearing the Dhamma, hearing the teachings sadhamma savanaa. The third one is skilful reflection, wise consideration yoniso manasikaara. And the last one is Dhammanupata patipattaa practising Dhamma in accordance with Dhamma. These are a framework for how to

relate to growth.

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- because it seems so far off and remote -

One of the things we do is we tend to measure progress in terms of experience. We have some experience and we think 'This is . . .' and then we measure it and say, "This must mean that I'm progressing somehow". And then we have some other experience and say, "Well, this must mean I'm falling apart". We don't look at things in terms of process. We tend to isolate instances, isolate experiences; and then measure them, gauge them, and experience happiness or suffering because of them. The Buddha's teaching is more concerned with process. How do we get involved in the process of maturing? How do we get into the process of growing and progressing in our practice, rather than holding to some experience or trying to create some experience, so that we can say "Oh, right, I definitely must be progressing, I must be growing"?

It's necessary to take an interest in this process. It's something which is cyclical, it's not a linear progression. As you notice in the sense of coming to meet a wise being, of listening to Dhamma, skilful reflection, practising Dhamma in accordance with Dhamma these are things which revolve around each other all the time. You're not taking a linear progression and going from point A to point B. It's a process which is working all the time, on an external level and on an internal level because the wise being we should meet is also the wise being who's within us as well.

On an external level, we need to rely on teachers, on people who set the example, so we need to seek out a teacher, seek out someone who is a good example. And even if we're living in a monastery, practising together, to also seek out the teacher, seek out the people who are setting examples. This is where supporting each other is important. It doesn't mean if you're sitting at the top of the line you're a teacher or you're called a wise being. For each of us, it's our duty to try to set an example for others; and then for us, as we're living together, to try to support each other in practice. So seeking each other out is necessary seeking out those who can encourage us, who can give us guidance.

In the same way, with listening to teachings, if it's in the form of formal discourse, or listening to tapes, reading books whatever way that we can receive the teachings and reflect and contemplate the teachings is a way which is conducive to growth. Our practise is nurtured by coming into contact with teachings which are direct and in accordance with truth *sadhamma sevan*. *Sadhamma* is the 'good Dhamma' you're listening to, the good teachings - the teachings which are in accordance with Truth. Investigating them, listening to them, hearing them: it's the hearing of Dhamma which is one of the conditions for the arising of right view. If we've not heard the teachings, or not come into contact with teachings which are direct or straight, it's difficult for right view to arise. Unless you're a fully enlightened Buddha or a self-enlightened Buddha, it's difficult. We need to listen, we need to pay attention, we have to come into contact with teachings. And if we're not listening, not paying attention, then, of course, even if teachings are

being given, they're not absorbed, not brought into the heart. So, then, listen to the teachings.

Skilful reflection is using the capacity for investigation to recognise clearly the way things function. How do we use our thought process? This is something that we have: we definitely have the ability to think. Sometimes the quality of *yoniso* - careful consideration, skilful reflection is not exercised as much as it should be. I remember an article I read (someone wrote a book about it; the title of the book was based on this article): In a small town, a fire was reported upstairs in a house. Smoke was coming out of the windows and the fire department was called. They go to the house, break in, go upstairs and find that the bed is on fire, smoking away, and there's somebody lying on the bed. So they rescue this person and put the fire out. And then after the fire is out and the danger's over, they ask the person who was lying on the bed how the fire started. And the person said, "I don't know, it was on fire when I lay down." Which is a distinct lack of *yoniso*! We laugh at it but, you know, how many times have we done really stupid things? And the kind of suffering that we get into, the confusion and the chaos that we create in our lives, should normally be ringing all sorts of alarm bells! But we disregard them, and just go ahead and butt our heads up against this wall of suffering. So with *yoniso*, careful consideration, we can look at what it is that is creating suffering. This is our guideline in practice.



The Buddha has quite brilliantly used it as the bottom line in the teachings. What is it that is creating suffering? What is the way out of suffering? How is suffering caused? We need to be able to reflect and consider. There are different ways of investigating that: investigating the experience of suffering; how it's caused; where it comes from; what it revolves around. It's also just reflecting on the nature of our experience which things are pleasurable, which are suffering. What is the way out of both of them? Because our natural tendency is to go towards the pleasurable and to try to avoid what is suffering. But maybe that's not the way out. We need to be able to reflect sometimes, and contemplate the things which are pleasurable: they may be a fleeting pleasure, but inherently they lead to more suffering. Some of the things that are suffering are not necessarily just suffering; there could be something beneficial in them. So we need to be able to investigate experience as well. Some of the things also which seem pleasurable are pleasurable and should be cultivated.

Even though the Buddha uses suffering as a bottom line or a foundation in teaching, it's also skilful to recognise that the path we follow, the path of practice, is one that leads to something which is considered happiness, and is pleasurable: the pleasure or well-being of keeping our precepts well; the pleasure or well-being of restraint; the pleasure or well-being of kindness

and compassion; the pleasure or well-being of the peaceful mind. These are all things which we need to cultivate, to develop. We need to understand their use or function and how to bring them up. But then we also have to recognise the grasping at the desire-based pleasure which leads to frustration and so to more suffering. In the same way, suffering is seen in two ways: the suffering which leads to more suffering and the suffering which leads out of suffering. We can notice when we're in the suffering of aversion or anger. It's unpleasant in the present moment and it leads to more suffering.

Whereas with something like, say, the suffering of having to endure something, the suffering of training oneself, the suffering of just having to sit still and watch the breath: there's an element of suffering there, but then it's also something that leads to a sense of well-being a training, a stabilising, a settling. So to be able to investigate, to be able to consider things carefully, is important. Our tendency, as I said, is to always consider things in black and white: "This is pleasurable, I'll go for it." "This is suffering, I want to get out of it, to avoid it." Whereas, if we look at things in terms of a process, there is that which is a cause for something else to arise. We're seeing it in a different light, relating to it in a different way. So that, through our consideration, our reflection, this is a supporting of our growth in practice. We have to consider: what is the way out? What is the way to peace? What is the way to freedom, to liberation?

Regarding practising Dhamma in accordance with Dhamma , there is a story in the Christian tradition. During the time of the building of the great cathedral at Chartres, there was much excitement at this great monument going up. Of course, it took several generations for it to be built, and word spread through Europe of this great cathedral. At one time, an Italian pilgrim came to Chartres to pay respects and see this cathedral being built. Arriving there in the late afternoon, coming in and looking around, he sees people packing up and doing this and that, cleaning up and he sees a man covered in wood shavings. He asks him, "What are you doing here?" "I'm a carpenter, I'm making doors and windows. I do all the woodwork here." Then he sees somebody else, all dirty and grubby and covered in dust. He asks again, "What are you doing here?" "I'm doing the stonework, carving these stones for the building." And then he sees somebody else, covered in various colours and glittering with bits of glass, and he asks him, "What are you doing here?" "Oh, I'm a glass worker, I'm making these windows." Then he sees a little old lady who is cleaning up, sweeping up at the end of the day, and he asks her, "What are you doing here?" She stops and looks up, and looks around her at the cathedral with its great sense of awe, and says "I'm here helping to build this great cathedral for the glory of god." That's a different perspective. That's a sense of seeing what the practice is, seeing what it means when they say, "practising Dhamma in accordance with Dhamma". You have to have a vision of what you are going towards, a vision of what you're practicing for. You have to have a vision of what the purpose is. And that's what our practice is. The practice that we're doing is what is going in that direction.

If we don't have a vision of what we're doing, a clear sense of what it's going towards, and try to lift our minds up towards that, then we get stuck in our own little dramas of me' practising the Dhamma and my difficulties and my suffering over it. Or we get caught up into being nice little Vinaya monks, keeping the rules and taking that as the path; or getting caught up in trying to get our meditation down. . . All these things are part of the path. We have to learn how to keep the rules, we have to learn how to be restrained according to a discipline, a sla. But it also has to be seen in terms of what it's for what its purpose is, what it's going towards in the same way as with the building of the cathedral: if they just get caught up in their little jobs, they miss the point of it and they miss the joy of the cathedral around them. So in our practice also, we have to have a sense of what we're practising, what we're doing to have a clear perception of that. But then, also, what is it going towards? You have to keep lifting the mind toward that.

Our sila is for lifting the mind beyond a tendency to just not be restrained; to be established in a sense of wanting to do the right thing you know, what is in accordance with truth. And meditation is not just to become proficient in keeping the mind on the breath. It's being able to develop a mindfulness and a clarity, which is able to stay with the object of meditation, but then also see what its nature is. Why is the mind bowing to our own feelings and thoughts and perceptions? Why do we keep taking it as self? If we don't have a sense of lifting the mind beyond just the mindfulness or a concentrated state, then we get bogged down and we don't experience the freedom of the mind, we don't experience the cessation of suffering, because it hasn't been in the context of its nature. The same with the teachings the teachings of the Buddha, or the Wisdom teachings: they're not just to be memorised or copied down in our notebooks and referred back to when we forget them. They're to be internalised and recognised. What are they for? They're for cutting off our delusions, for cutting through our attachments. So we have to keep bringing them in and lifting them up.

One way of seeing our practice of Dhamma is of going towards a goal: It has to be going towards something. Another aspect of it is, I think, putting the "little dhammas" in the "big dhammas". By that I mean getting ourselves orderly. Dhammaanupatipadaa: anu is the little things and it's going towards the bigger dhammas. So our practice is a progressive practice, it's a process. We have to learn how to fit it together. And also how to refer back. Sometimes we have difficulties in practice, sometimes doubts come up. Learn how to come back to the beginning. Learn how to start over again. Start from the beginning and do the basics, and then it grows from there, so that our practice is a constant sort of growing. Our progress then happens on its own. We also have to nurture it, to look after that process. That's what we have to learn: how to pay attention in practice and how to develop our practice. Our maturity comes from that. There's a tendency again to try to create some experience and then hold that experience - trying to have a clearer experience of "That's what Dhamma is.", "This is what practice is", or "This is what peace is." I think this is a great obstacle that we keep coming up against. We have to learn to pay attention to the process of just looking after things which support the growth of Dhamma - and then it grows from there.

This is what Ajahn Chah would emphasise over and over again in practice. We would come to him and ask him all sorts of questions. "Give us the method, give us the way". And he would so often tell us, it's not just squeezing an experience out of the mind. It's like growing a tree: you don't just put it in the ground and then force it to come up. You have to prepare the ground, you have to put the seed in the ground, you have to fertilise the soil, you have to water it, you have to look after it. . . and then the tree will grow on its own. And the tree will grow according to its own nature, and it will give fruit according to its nature. It's not our task to try to designate or try to force the tree to grow faster, or to give fruit in a particular way that we think it should. Learning how to look after the mind is similar to learning how to look after the tree.

So I offer this for your reflection.



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Why go to a monastery

From a talk given at Amaravati by Sister Candasiri.

One question we all need to ask ourselves is, Why do we come to a monastery? Whether we are monks, nuns, novices, lay guests or visitors, we should ask, Why have I come? We need to be clear about this in order to derive the greatest benefit from what a monastery has to offer. If we are not clear, we can waste a lot of time doing things that may detract from the possible benefits to be found here.

The Buddha spoke of three fires three ailments that we, as human beings are afflicted by. These three things keep us continually moving, never able to rest or to be completely at ease; they are listed as greed, hatred and delusion lobha, dosa, moha. He also, out of compassion, pointed out the antidote.

Actually, these fires are based on natural instincts. For example, greed or sensual desire the sexual drive and the desire for food is what allows humanity to survive. Without sexual desire, none of us would be here now! And of course without hunger, or desire for food, we would not be inclined to take in the nourishment we need to maintain the body in a reasonable state of health. However, a difficulty arises when we lose touch with what is needed, and seek sensual gratification for its own sake.

Another kind of survival instinct is our response to danger. Either we turn around and attack something that is perceived as a threat to our physical survival, or we try to get away from it. This is the basis for dosa hatred or aversion. Clearly, too, this has an important place in nature, but again we have become confused and what we frequently find ourselves defending is not so much the physical body, but the sense of self what we perceive ourselves to be, in relation to one another.

You might ask: what kind of freedom is this - tying oneself down in a situation where one is constantly restrained, always having to conform?

The third fire, which follows on quite naturally from this, is delusion moha; not really seeing clearly or understanding how things are, not really understanding what it is to be a human being. We tend to fix ourselves and each other as personalities, or selves. But these are just ideas or concepts, which we measure against other concepts of who or what we should be. Then if anyone comes along and challenges that self, it can bring out a strong reaction in us we instinctively attack, defend or try to get away from the perceived threat. Really, it's a kind of madness, when you think about it.

Now, as I said before, the Buddha, having pointed out the nature of the disease, also presented the cure. This came in the form of simple teachings, which can help us to live in a way that enables us to understand, and thereby free ourselves from these diseases; and also to avoid doing things that exacerbate them.

This brings me to the real reason that we come to a monastery. We want to free our hearts from disease, from the bonds of desire and confusion; and we recognise that what is presented here is the possibility of bringing this about. Of course there may be other reasons: some people don't really know why they have come they just feel attracted to the place.

So what is it about the monastery that is different from what happens outside it?... It is a place that reminds us of our aspiration and potential. There are the lovely images, of the Buddha and his disciples which seem to radiate a feeling of calm, ease and alertness. Also, here we find a community of monks and nuns who have decided to live following the lifestyle that the Buddha recommended for healing those diseases.

Having recognised that we are sick and that we need help, we begin to see that the cure is in direct opposition to the ways of the world. We see that if we are to cure ourselves we need first to understand the cause of the sickness, which is desire. So we need to understand our desires to get, to get rid of and to exist and be a separate self in order to free ourselves from them. So instead of following desires, we examine them closely.

The discipline that we follow is based on precepts, which, used wisely, can engender a sense of dignity and self-respect. They restrain us from actions or speech which are harmful to ourselves or others, and delineate a standard of simplicity or renunciation. We ask ourselves, What do I really need?, rather than responding to the pressures of a materialistic society.

But how do precepts help us to understand these three fires? In a sense, what our monastic discipline offers is a container within which one can observe desire as it arises. We deliberately put ourselves into a form which prevents us from following all our desires, in order to see them and to notice how they change. Normally, when we are caught up in the process of desire, there is no sense of objectivity. We tend to be totally identified with it, so it is very difficult to see it clearly or to do anything about it, other than be swept along with it.

So with lust or aversion, we can recognise that these are natural energies or drives, which everyone has. We are not saying that its wrong, say, to have sexual desire or even to follow it in appropriate circumstances but we recognise that it is for a particular purpose, and it will bring about a certain result. As monks and nuns we have decided that we do not want to have children. We also recognise that the pleasure of gratification is only very fleeting, in relation to the possible longer term implications and responsibility. So we choose not to follow sexual desire.



However, this does not mean that we don't experience it that as soon as we shave our heads and put on a robe, we immediately stop experiencing any kind of desire. In fact, what can happen is that our experience of these desires is actually enhanced when we come to a monastery. This is because in lay life we can do all kinds of things to make ourselves feel OK usually without really being aware of what we are doing. Sometimes there is just a subliminal sense of dis-ease, followed by the reaching out to get something to relieve it always moving from one thing to the next. In the monastery it's not so easy to do this any more. We deliberately tie ourselves down in order to look at the drives, energies or desires that would normally keep us moving.

Now you might ask: But what kind of freedom is this? tying oneself down in a situation where one is constantly restrained, always having to conform? Always having to behave in a particular way; to bow in a particular way, and at particular times; to chant at a particular speed and pitch; to sit in a particular place, beside particular people I've been sitting next to or behind Sister Sundara for the past fifteen years! . . . What kind of freedom is this?

It brings freedom from the bondage of desire. Rather than helplessly, blindly being pulled along by our desire, we are free to choose to act in ways that are appropriate, in harmony with those around us.

Now it's important to realise that 'freedom from desire' doesn't mean 'not having desire.' We could feel very guilty and really struggle if we thought like that. As I said before, desire is part of nature, only it has been distorted as a result of our conditioning, our upbringing, the values of society and education. We are not going to get rid of it just like that - just because we want to, or feel that we shouldn't have desire; it's actually a more subtle approach that's required.

The monastic form and precepts help us to make a peaceful space around these desire energies, so that, having arisen, they can burn themselves out. It is a process that takes great humility, because first we have to acknowledge that the desire is there, and that can be very humbling. Often, particularly in monastic life, our desires can be extremely petty; the sense of self can be bound up in something very trivial. For example, it might be that we have a very strong idea about how carrots should be chopped; so if someone suggests that we do it differently we can become very agitated and defensive! So we need to be very patient, very humble.

Fortunately there are some simple reference points, or Refuges, which can provide us with security and a sense of perspective, amid the chaotic world of our desires. These of course are Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha: the Buddha, our teacher also that within which knows things as they are, seeing clearly, not confused or agitated by sense impression; the Dhamma, the Teaching or the Truth, how things actually are right now often quite different from our ideas about things; and Sangha the lineage or community of those who practise, and also our aspiration to live in accordance with what we know to be true, rather than to follow all kinds of confused and selfish impulses that can arise.

The Buddha gave some simple ways of turning to these. These are called Foundations of Mindfulness. Mindfulness of the body is one I use a great deal in my own practice. The body can be a very good friend to us because it doesn't think! The mind, with its thoughts and concepts can always confuse us, but the body is very simple we can notice how it is at any moment. For example, if someone acts or speaks in a way that I find intimidating, I can notice my instinctual reaction, which is to tense up in a defensive attitude, and perhaps respond in an aggressive way. However, when I am mindful of the process, I can choose not to react in this way. Instead of breathing in, puffing myself up, I can concentrate on breathing out relaxing, so that I become a less threatening presence to the other person. If, through mindfulness, I can let go of my defensive attitude, they too can relax rather than perpetuating the process of

reactivity. In this way, we can bring a little peace into the world.

People visiting the monasteries often comment on the peaceful atmosphere that they find there. But this is not because everyone is feeling peaceful or experiencing bliss and happiness continuously they can be experiencing all kinds of things. In fact, one sister said that she had never experienced such murderous rage or such powerful feelings of lust until she entered the Sangha! What is different in a monastery is the practice. So whatever the monks and nuns might be going through, they are at least making the effort to be present with it, bearing it patiently, rather than feeling that it shouldn't be like that, or trying to make it change.

The monastic form provides a situation in which renunciation and constraint are the very conditions for the arising of passionate feelings; but also there is the reassuring presence of other samanas. When we're really going through it, we can speak to an older, more experienced brother or sister in the life, whose response is likely to be something like, Oh yes, don't worry about that; it will pass. That happened to me. Its normal, it's simply part of the process of purification. Be patient. So we find the confidence to continue even when everything seems to be collapsing or going crazy inside.

Coming to a monastery we find people who are willing to look at and understand the root cause of human ignorance, selfishness and all the abominable things that happen in the world; people who are willing to look into their own hearts and to witness the greed and violence that others are so ready to criticise out there. Through experiencing and knowing these things we learn how to make peace with them, right here in our own hearts, in order that they may come to cessation. Then, maybe, rather than simply reacting to the ignorance of humanity and adding to the confusion and violence that we see around us, we are able to act or speak with wisdom and compassion in ways that can help to bring a sense of ease and harmony among people.

So its not an escape, but an opportunity to turn around and face up to all the things we have tended to avoid in our lives. Through calmly and courageously acknowledging things as they are, we begin to free ourselves from the doubts, anxiety, fear, greed, hatred and all the rest which constantly bind us into conditioned reactions. Here, we have the support of good friends, and a discipline and teachings to help keep us on course in what sometimes seems like an impossible endeavour!

May we all realise true freedom. Evam.



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Fantasia: The Nature of Perception

Venerable Sunyato offers some graphic representations of the tricks and power of perception.

We love to build fantasies in our minds; creations of pleasure, hope, judgement, regret, etc. We spend endless hours lost in these daydreams. Few people give this habit any serious examination; most would feel that it is harmless enough. If we consider it to any depth, however, some surprises can be found in store.

The Buddha certainly seemed to feel that it was more than a passing thought. He said: "It is in this fathom-long body, with its perceptions and its mind, that I describe the world, the origin of the world." (*Sam. Nikaya II, 36; also Ang. Nikaya IV, 46*)

The origin of the world. How could that be? How could we think up the world? Oddly enough this is what present day psychology states:

[From a] . . . superstructure of ideas or . . . gestalt of relationships . . . are derived various concepts and functions, some of which are . . . self, world, other people, time, space, logic, purpose, various inhibitions, conscious fears, and defences. (*239-40 Tart, Charles T.; Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, 1969*)

If we keep looking we can actually experience the frustrated attempts to create forms and identify them.

What are they talking about? The self and the world seem to be more than a thought. How could they be simply a concept?

Many people have observed that the human mind loves patterns or forms and enjoys creating them. In developing infants there is a preference for staring at complex patterns rather than simple ones or listening to rhythms instead of random noises. New technology can observe the attempts of the eye to seek out shapes and forms within other shapes and forms that have already been identified. This urge to find new patterns exists in all the senses.

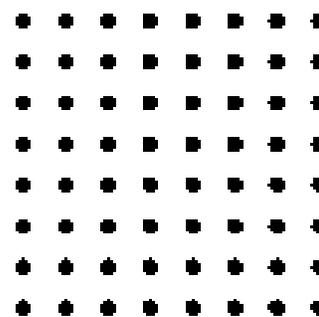


Figure 1

It is possible to see this tendency in our present moment. Figure 1 is a neutral grid of dots. If we stare at it for some time the natural movement of the mind will attempt to create patterns within it. There is no obvious pattern here except for a number of dots equally spaced but the mind does not read it in this way. It will attempt to view this as different forms; vertical rows, horizontal rows, squares, diagonals and rectangles. If we keep looking we can actually experience the frustrated attempts to create forms and identify them but in this situation they cannot

be sustained.

Another example of our pattern making concerns 'how' we create an object. We produce forms against a background. That is, we choose a pattern against the background of another pattern (or patterns) to create a shape which we can then identify (name). In the same way we find patterns of sound, physical sensations, taste, smell, and 'objects' in the mind. It's a particular sound against the background of silence or other noise; a particular physical sensation against the background of a general sense of the body; and so on. All of these eventually become mental shapes in the background space of the mind.

In figure 2 the background is not so clear, therefore the shapes are unstable. One moment we see a black goblet against a white background and the next moment we see two white faces staring at each other against a black background. We cannot see these different objects at the same time. Literally we create two worlds from this one basic sensation.

Even in a situation where the object does stand out against a background the mind still has great joy in seeking various forms with different meanings. In figure 3 do you see a bird looking left? If those are ears instead of a beak do you see a rabbit looking right?

And in figure 4 do you see an old woman with a big nose; her mouth pulled down close to her fur coat? Or do you see the cheek of a young woman instead of a nose and, instead of a mouth, a choker on a long beautiful neck?

In these situations we can actually experience the mind leaping about; trying to create forms and give them various names. Obviously they aren't any of these things, they are simply marks on paper. But what about that idea? When we were born we would not have known these were marks on paper. We had to learn that. We had to learn to identify forms that we would call paper and forms that we call marks. Obviously that's what consciousness does. But what about that pattern? When we were born we didn't know any 'thing' called 'consciousness'. We had to learn to divide a pattern of some kind from all the other possible patterns of sensation and name it 'consciousness'.



Figure 2

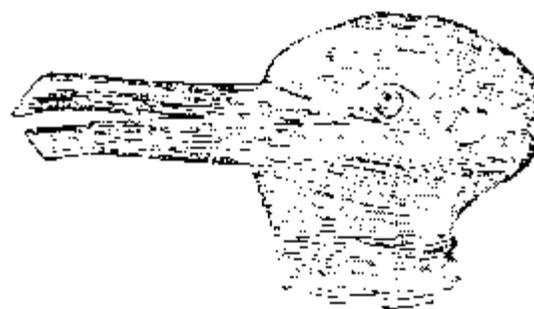


Figure 3

Wherever we are our eyes go to certain visual patterns (objects) that we like or dislike and we ignore all other visual sensations. Our ears hear certain sound patterns that we like or dislike and ignore the others. We sit lost in these mental patterns: patterns of physical sensation; of tastes; of smells; of solid, stable patterns; patterns of movement, energy, space and relationships between patterns. Even patterns of emptiness; ideas of no form, no 'thingness'. All of these become forms in the mind. We sit lost in our 'knowledge' thinking these limited experiences are some absolute reality.

As children our lives were mystery, wonder, and delight. There was relative innocence and vulnerability. As we mature, the mind chooses a pattern here, a form there; labelling, comparing, judging, always remembering; building its fortress of forms, names, images, concepts, views and opinions. We rarely see what is. Instead we are locked in this fortress, an interpretation, one particular arrangement of patterns, one particular view, one well-worn habit.

With this in mind it is worth considering the Buddha's teaching:

It is in this fathom-long body, with its perceptions and its mind, that I describe the world, the origin of the world. *Sam. Nikaya II 36; Ang. Nikaya IV 48*

Name and form is the necessary condition for the sixfold body base . . .

Consciousness is the necessary condition for name and form . . .

but name and form is the necessary condition for consciousness . . .

This consciousness turns back upon itself; it does not extend beyond name and form. *Sam. Nikaya, 65*

No matter what concept of self arises, the fact is always other than the concept. *Udana III 10*
. . . types of self arise as though they were true . . . but this field of views is the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views. *Maj. Nikaya 2*

Perceptions such as 'I am', 'I am not', 'I will be', 'I will not be', 'I will have form', 'I will not have form', 'I will have perceptions', 'I will not have perceptions', 'I will neither have nor not have perceptions'; monks, are an affliction, an ulcer, a dart. By transcending these perceptions one is a muni, a peaceful one.

Monks, the muni is not born, does not age, does not die, is not confused, he does not yearn. *Maj. Nikaya III, 246*

. . . feelings, thoughts, perceptions still arise in an awakened one but he knows them for what they are. *Maj. Nikaya 123*

Some people view life as 'consciousness' in a 'body' in an external 'world'. Scientists have viewed it as atoms and molecules, lines of force, pure energy. Some religions view it as mind itself. Can we come to understand these views, this machine of thought? In meditation we can experience these perceptions as passing sensations, not absolute realities, and in that awareness is the experience of essential freedom; not formed, not bound, not controlled. Stepping out of perception to know perception for what it is. In meditation we experience the release from our worlds. The Buddha's word for this was mindfulness. In this 'fullness' mind,



Figure 4

which is not fragmented or conflicted, the perceptions and thoughts are part of that fullness but they do not blindly take control.

The Buddha asked us to understand views, to see their limitations and to experience the freedom of not attaching to them. We can use them wisely for the necessities of living and we can let them go. In his thoroughness he cautioned us against attaching to even his own teaching which he described as a raft for crossing a river of pain. He warned us against picking up the raft and carrying it around on our heads.

So, back to the grid of dots. If I ask you "Is this a group of vertical rows?" you would say "Yes", because it can be perceived in that way. If I asked "Is this a group of horizontal rows?" you would say "Yes", because it can be perceived that way. "Is it triangles or diagonal rows?" - "Yes". What is it really? It depends on how you look at it.



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The Dhamma School

The Dhamma School opened in Brighton last September, in the ground floor of a house with one teacher and four young pupils. This year, the number of pupils doubled and various adults offered their help with administrative and teaching duties.

The Dhamma School in Brighton has completed its first term with visible joy and progress. The end of term was celebrated with an invitation for parents, governors, and trustees to join the children for an hour of drama, music, dance and tea (we have very small premises that were filled to capacity!) This was not so much a performance as an opportunity to kick off our shoes and join in. That's the way we try to work at the school. The teachers are there not to perform or to preach, but to provide a wholesome environment for the children to explore and develop the skills they realise are valuable. How?

Since we opened in September with four pupils between 4 and 6 years old I have received numerous letters from trainee teachers and students of theology, institutions dealing with children with special learning difficulties, and those trying to plan the 'spiritual, moral, and cultural development' of pupils in state schools. When people ask, "What is Buddhist education?" or "How does it differ from state or alternative independent schools?" I feel I don't have any answer, other than we are in the process of finding out. This open approach is the first difference I detect being based on mindfulness, awareness of responding to the moment, rather than speculation, or defence of a theory conceived in other circumstances. Realising the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, the way that Buddhist Education grows in the Western world will be a result of a multitude of different influences from teachers, pupils, parents, Dhamma practitioners, U.K. politics, local communities, and financial imperatives. etc. It is not the intention of the Trust or teachers at this time to propose any more than respect for the five precepts, and direct personal experience of the teachings of the Buddha and other enlightened beings.

Learning is an internal process and requires active participation by the learner not coercion from the teacher.

As well as the need for safety and security, all children have a thirst for new experiences. They appreciate the way that books can expand those experiences beyond the immediate time and place and are keen to learn to read to avail themselves of that facility. All four children who started in September have made very good progress in this area because we have the opportunity in a small class to give them individual attention, and the flexibility to change their classroom activities to take advantage of those moments when their interest is high. We read books that are fun, books that are sad, books about familiar situations and those that fly off into mysterious imaginary worlds. We read together and alone, we listen to an adult and we listen to each other. We visit the library, practise with structured schemes, and make our own books. We

have read such things as the Jataka Tales, dealing with the Buddhas previous lives, and Pam Ayres' poetry. We have used reference books on clothes from different parts of the world, and picture dictionaries in French and English. We play lotto, flash card games, and build phonic charts, ... and all that accounts for no more than five percent of our time. Literacy and numeracy are cornerstones of education but there id lots of space left to go swimming, singing, building, and talking to each other.

At the beginning of the day we have some time together to hear how we are all feeling, what has been happening to us, and what we are hoping to do during the coming day. We try to incorporate everyone's wishes, whether for a familiar game, or something new. I, as teacher and guide, put in my own suggestions for activities along with all the others. So far my offerings have been happily taken up by the children. If the activities become dull, uncomfortable or irrelevant I would immediately have to revise my style of lesson because the children would reject them. Learning is an internal process and requires active participation by the learner not coercion from the teacher. The children are beginning to understand that we can't choose to go to our farm plot on Monday if the transport has been arranged for Thursday, and that beautiful letters result from regular practice. I don't need to tell them; they can see it for themselves. Indeed they often ask for structured work.



The child-centered approach of the 1960's, based largely on John Dewey's philosophy (1859-1952) of open-mindedness, pragmatism and dialectic, has fallen from favour in this current political climate. This is because it often lacks the academic rigor and the reflective discipline of classroom practice, but recognition of the needs of the child does not automatically lead to academic incompetence. When those needs are balanced with recognition of the skills the emergent adult will eventually live by, this global family classroom activity becomes an ongoing reflection on the way things are both internally and externally. Writing a regular reflection on the relationship between the Buddha-Dhamma and the actual classroom situations each week is just one way in which we attempt to stay open to the changing trends in educational theory, while remaining grounded in conventional reality. Clearly, parents appreciate the benefits of this approach because our small school is now full to capacity (eight pupils, and seven on the waiting list) and we are already preparing to move to larger premises with room for fifty pupils.

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Sutta Class: Immorality, Confession & Forgiveness

Venerable Varado led a series of discussions at Amaravati on the topic of samvara (restraint). The following article is drawn from those talks.

In spite of our best wishes our psychological make-up contains elements not always pleasing to us. Indeed, such elements as guilt, shame and remorse can be unbearable. Unfortunately our reaction to this guilt and remorse can easily lead to further pain; the reason being that our instinct is to hide what is hurting us. This is illustrated in a verse from the Dhammapada:

Easily seen are others faults.
 Hard indeed to see ones own.
 One winnows abroad others faults like chaff,
 But conceals ones own faults like a crafty hunter.
 (*Dhammapada 252*)

The Buddha highly praised the use of confession, and in a poetic simile warns us against concealing of offences:

*Channam ativassati
 Vivitam nativassati
 Tasma channam vivaretna
 Evan tam nativassatiti*

Rain soaks what is contained
 It doesn't soak what is open
 Therefore open up what is contained
 So rain won't soak it.
 (*Vin. II 240*)

The Vinaya Commentary to this verse points out that if you commit an offence and conceal it, then you will fall into another, fresh offence. If however you disclose it, then you will not fall into the same offence.

Before the Patimokkha recitation, Theravadin monks must confess offences. If a monk hides an offence, that is regarded as conscious lying. And conscious lying, the Buddha taught, is an obstacle (*antarayiko*) to meditation: obstructing and preventing its bliss, its calm, and its many fruits and benefits. However, for monks who reveal offences:

there comes to be comfort (*phasu*). (*Vin.II 105*)

When admonishment is well given and well received
we can expect it to lead to spiritual growth.

This is the comfort of meditation, its bliss and its realisations. Confessing offences is of benefit regardless of the gravity of the offence.

King Ajatasattu of Magadha used the opportunity of a meeting with the Buddha to confess to the murder of his father, the previous king:

Transgression overcame me Lord, foolish, erring and wicked as I was in that I, for the sake of the throne deprived my father, that good and just King, of his life. May the Blessed Lord accept my confession of my evil deed that I may restrain myself in future.

The Buddha replied:

Indeed, transgression overcame you when you deprived your father, that good and just King, of his life. But since you have acknowledged the transgression and confessed it, as is right, we will accept it. For he who has acknowledged his transgression as such and confesses it for betterment in future will grow in the Aryan discipline. (*Digha. Nikaya I 85*) (*Transl. Maurice Walshe: Thus Have I Heard*)

And similarly, a soldier, sent by Devadatta to murder the Buddha, having found himself unable to do such a thing: approached, having inclined his head to the Lord's feet, he spoke thus to the Lord:

Lord, a transgression has overcome me, foolish, misguided, wrong that I was, in that I was coming here with my mind malignant, my mind set on murder. Lord, may the Lord acknowledge for me the transgression as a transgression for the sake of restraint in future. (*Vin.II 191*)

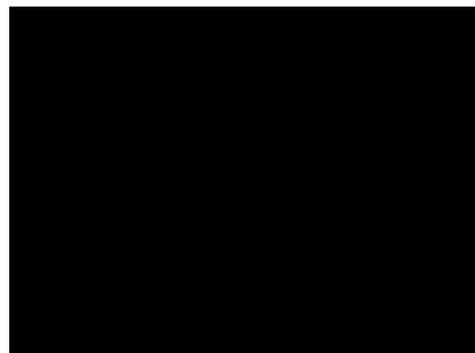
The Buddha replied:

Truly friend a transgression overcame you . . . But if you, having seen the transgression as a transgression, confess according to the rule, we acknowledge it for you: for, friend, this in the discipline of a noble one is growth whoever, having seen a transgression as a transgression, confesses according to the rule, he attains restraint in future.

When we as meditators see that there is an inner psychological result to our own actions, and see the potential we have of hurting our own minds, it then becomes clear that we must order our life and activity in a very careful way. How we should do this is outlined by the Buddha in: *The Discourse on an Exhortation to Rahula at Ambalattthika*.

Rahula, what is a mirror for?
Venerable Sir, it is for reflection.
In the same way, Rahula, should activity of
body, of speech, and of mind be undertaken
with reflection and consideration.

And so the Buddha teaches Rahula to consider all activity that he is about to perform, by body, speech or mind, and to ask himself of such behaviour:



Will it harm myself?
Will it harm others?
Will it harm us both?
Is it unwholesome or wholesome?
Will its result be painful, yielding pain?
Or happy, resulting in happiness?

If you consider potential activity to be harmful or unwholesome you should avoid it. And of harmful or unwholesome activity of body or speech for which you are responsible, it should be:

confessed, disclosed, declared to the Teacher or to intelligent Brahmafarrers . . . so it induces restraint in future.

Of unwholesome and harmful thoughts:

you should be concerned, ashamed and fed-up, and being concerned, ashamed and fed-up, you should exercise restraint in future.

And the Buddha concludes:

Rahula, indeed, all those samanans and brahmanas who have purified themselves in the past and in the future, all of them have done so, and will do so, by repeated consideration and review. (*MI 414*)

Such is the importance of this sutta that it was recorded in the Bhabru Rock Edict of King Asoka so that all monks, nuns, and lay followers should hear often and reflect on. Purity of moral conduct is assisted by the presence of other monks and nuns. This is because the Buddha allowed and encouraged them to admonish each other:

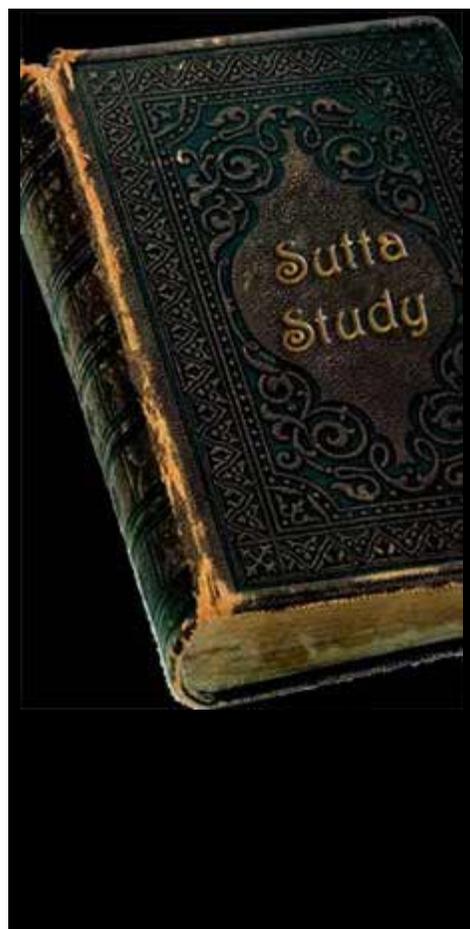
Thus comes to be development for the disciples of the Lord, by mutual admonishment and mutual rehabilitation. (*Vin. III 178*)

But admonishment and reprobation must be done with sensitivity in order for it to strengthen, not damage, another's spiritual practice. Reprobation should be done at the right time (*kalena*) rather than necessarily immediately (*akalena*); it should be done gently (*sanhena*) rather than harshly (*pharasena*); it should be done seeking welfare (*hitesita*), rather than seeking an opportunity to vent one's feelings. (*Vin. II 249*) So the admonisher needs all the qualities of patience and kindness and wisdom, otherwise he will achieve very little.

And when we find ourselves the recipient of admonishment or reprobation the Buddha encouraged us to seek support in two dhammas: truth (*sacca*) and steadfastness (*akuppe*) that is, in seeking the truth of the matter in question, (rather than merely justifying ourselves) and in remaining cool, rather than allowing ourselves to be upset. And when admonishment is well given and well received we can expect it to lead to spiritual growth.

Related to the topic of confession, are the topics of apology and forgiveness.

In the Mahavagga section of Vinaya we find the Buddha encouraging apology and forgiveness. In the Buddha's day young monks would share a room with their teachers and this



led to a situation recorded in the Mahavagga section of the Vinaya where young monks: did not conduct themselves properly. Having been on that account dismissed by their teachers they did not apologise. The Buddha encouraged them to apologise. They still refused. So the Buddha laid down a rule: Monks, one who is dismissed is not, not to apologise. For whoever should not apologise, there is an offence of wrongdoing.

Now the preceptors, being apologised to, did not forgive. The Buddha encouraged them to forgive. Even so they did not forgive. And those who had shared a room departed, disrobed, joined other sects. The Buddha said: Monks, when you are being apologised to, you should not, not forgive. For whoever does not, not forgive, there is an offence of wrongdoing.

In this story we see the reluctance of us humans to apologise and our reluctance to forgive. And I think if we see such reluctance in ourselves, such a story might help us see that actually the Buddha was also talking to us.



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EDITORIAL

A Matter of Tradition

It has become something of a tradition in our family of monasteries to have a Sangha gathering after the two-month Winter retreat. People come from all of our monasteries in Europe and there are formal and informal meetings. What about? It varies, and the content is perhaps deceptive. In general the reason for meeting is because of what the Sangha is as a collection of independent-minded individuals inclining towards a personal and direct realisation of truth. When so much contemplative experience is gleaned internally and personally, detachment and reflection on experience is greatly assisted by reference to like-minded people. To establish and cultivate the kind of relationships that will support authentic spiritual dialogue (not just doctrinal sanctity) requires trust, a recognition of mutual purpose, a laying aside of purely personal interests and differences and the lifting up of the fellowship of Sangha. Hence the Buddha encouraged regular and harmonious meetings of the Sangha, and Luang Por Chah kept to that standard throughout his communities in Thailand and their Sangha gatherings in Wat Pah Pong.

What gets talked about are matters of behaviour, and particularly in the more speculative Western branches, various topics such as the value or drawbacks of a tradition, democracy versus hierarchy, the use and abuse of ritual, the samana's role vis-a-vis the monastery and the lay community, and even whether we need to have more or less of these meetings. Some people may leave the meeting feeling glad that it's over, but although nothing much was decided, misperceptions were straightened out, the air was cleared of any potential storms, and it was a good thing. What also is generally the case despite (or because of) the airing of some unorthodox feelings, is that the values of the tradition are clarified and actually revitalised. After last year's innovative programmed discussions, there was feeling around the need to establish a silent focus for such gatherings, to have periods of sustained meditation and to have the opportunity to pay our respects as a community to Luang Por Sumedho. I felt the gathering of lay disciples turned into a contribution of ideas on how best to support both the monasteries and the samanans residing in them. All very traditional stuff.

That dispute which concerns either the livelihood or the refined observances is a trifle, Ananda. But, Ananda, if there should arise in the Order a dispute concerning the Path or the steps upon it, that would be for the great misfortune of the world

*Samagama Sutta,
Majjhima Nikaya, 104*

What is barely recognised is that no-one even questioned the value of morality, mind training and wisdom. The most significant point of harmony and celebration of those who practise well

is taken for granted in a world, sadly to say even in a Buddhist world, in which those values are infrequently endorsed. The Buddha's exhortation to meditate, to abandon attachment to dogma and speculation, to cut off superstitious rites and quasi-magic, and to live the Holy Life as pure and unblemished as a polished shell, has to an alarming extent been consigned to the nether world of library books. Put aside the statistics on what proportion of the Buddhist world actually cultivates the wisdom teachings that could grant liberation in this life; let's not make judgements as to what extent or how skilfully meditation is practised liberation is after all, a personal matter. But whatever happened to the basis of skilful conduct? Vast sums of money are spent on projects to ensure the fortunate re-birth of the donors, while magazines report on sexual abuse, alcoholism and misappropriation of funds by Buddhist lay and monastic teachers, East and West. And its a fair bet to say that alot does not get reported. Whatever happened to selflessness and integrity? One can point to a lot of things - human weaknesses that are left unchecked, the institutionalisation of monasticism into a social and even political prop, the blind adulation afforded to anyone with mystical jargon, charisma or an elaborate name - but basically it comes down to a malfunction or absence of function, of sangha.

Human weakness and corruptibility is as traditional as the quest for liberation; the Buddha recognised both, and developed the Sangha convention out of what had been a formless tradition of seekers and recluses in order to check the corruptions and empower the enlightenment faculties. As much as the samanās should meet regularly to confirm their aspiration and standards, the lay community (which forms an integral part of the fourfold Sangha) should do likewise. After all, it plays a pivotal role. What the lay community supports is going to be what dominates the scene. Samanās may have their failings, but it is lay people who empower them. Taking the tough bits out of the teachings, or dealing in lucky charms and spiritual dispensations happens because lay people want that and set up as spiritual authorities those who will do just that. So their power to support, correct or withdraw support is wasted on worldly aims and false teachings, and those teachings get propagated to further confuse those who come later.

Sometimes the standards that we should all abide by and be familiar with get lost in a mass of debate over fine details, clouded over by reference to transcendent values that ordinary folk couldn't understand, or dismissed as archaic. Smoke screens also have a long-standing tradition. But never mind the fine print, the standard of five precepts for a lay practitioner and ten (or at least eight) for one who has gone forth should present no obstacle to liberation. And they don't require profound knowlege or spiritual attainment to fathom and assess. Such assessment , within oneself and within the body of spiritual companions, is the self-regulating foundation of the Sangha. To raise that up is a worthy reason for meeting in large gatherings, and meeting often.

Ajahn Sucitto

Notices



Obituary

Venerable Ajahn Tate (Phra Rajanirodharangsee) 1902-1994

Obituary Venerable Ajahn Tate (Phra Rajanirodharangsee) 1902-1994 Venerable Ajahn Tate died on 17th December, aged 92. Although he was born in a remote and impoverished region of Thailand, his great knowledge and experience in Dhamma in both calm and insight meditation brought him prominence and deep respect throughout Thailand and, to a lesser extent, overseas.

His devoutly Buddhist family lived in a wilderness area of NE Thailand favoured by the tudong meditation monks, disciples of Ven. Ajahn Mun. One of their leading Ajahns - Ven. Ajahn Singh Khantayagamo - came through the boy Tate's village and he joined the party in their wanderings through the jungle.

During the time he was a novice he studied and meditated, and in 1923, became a bhikkhu with the name Phra Tate Desarangsee. (The king of Thailand later conferred several ecclesiastical titles on him, the last one being Ven. Phra Nirodharangsee.) He was one of the first generation of forest monks to train under Ven. Ajahn Mun, and with such guidance his meditation developed and he became a Teacher in his own right. His tudong wanderings took him through the forests and mountains of Thailand, from the hill-tribe areas of the far north to the south, where he was a pioneer in teaching Dhamma. His final years were spent back in NE Thailand, where he built several forest monasteries.

Some of the first overseas Buddhists visiting Thailand became disciples of Ven. Ajahn Tate. They were drawn by his manifest wisdom and by his serene and noble presence. Wat Hin Mark Peng, his monastery on the bank of the River Mekhong in Nongkhai Province, was well known to Westerners seeking a place to practise Dhamma, either as a lay person or monk.

When he was in his mid-seventies he travelled to other SE Asian countries and on to Australia to encourage the local Buddhists and inspired many people to visit him in Thailand.

Even though he always lived in forest monasteries far from the city, his influence reached people from every background, from royalty and the wealthy to the ordinary villager in rural areas. He drew them all towards Dhamma.

Venerable Ajahn Tate's heritage to us lives on in the monks and lay people he taught, the many monasteries for Dhamma practice he established (and the schools and other social projects), and his Dhamma books some of which have been translated into English.

We can offer our respect to a life so well lived by taking up his advice and practising Dhamma.

Not-Self

Night, the bride of heaven,
and her eyes,
the good stars,
leave no trace of memory or fire.

Then what am I,
but a tiny wick
guarding a bold blue flame
that will soon mix
with time,
and drop from sight
like the sun
from a cold sky.

Sister Medhanandi



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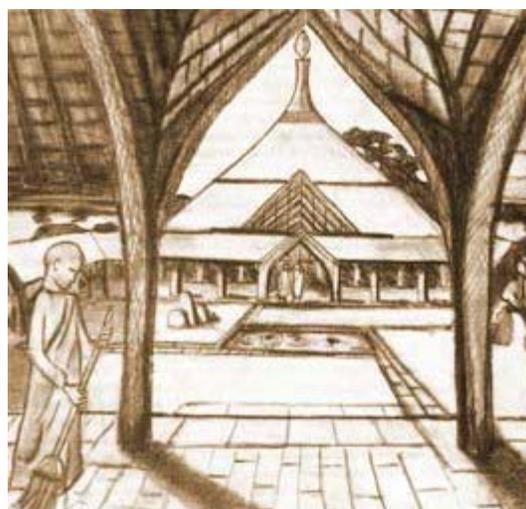
SIGNS OF CHANGE

A Heart for the Monastery

Amaravati Meditation Hall construction - A Progress Report.

This year the Wesaka Puja on 13th May will not only celebrate the 10th anniversary of the opening of Amaravati, but will also be marked by a ground-breaking ceremony to initiate the building of the new Meditation Hall. From the earliest days of Amaravati the need for a proper meditation hall was felt; now, after a lengthy gestation, the preparations are nearing completion and the wheels are in motion to begin construction by early summer.

The design has undergone a number of incarnations over the last few years. This process of giving birth--even only on paper--has been both enjoyable and difficult. The final result, we believe, is a design of elegance and simplicity, combining some of the finer elements of both modern and traditional building methods and forms. The spacious oak framed meditation hall is the centrepiece, approached through an outer cloister.



The view form the east, across the cloistered courtyard, to the new Meditation Hall. The existing Sala is to the right (out of the drawing).

But, and it is a big but, having a plan on paper is the easy bit. At Amaravati the community is preparing for the inevitable changes and disruption of the construction work. As this newsletter goes to press, work is already underway dismantling the old Dhamma Hall and Meeting Room blocks. Luang Por Sumedho -whose accommodation was in a part of the Dhamma Hall building and almost above the centre of the new hall - has moved into a temporary kuti. Large storage spaces have been lost (prompting a major exercise in junk disposal!) We are doing the demolition work ourselves (and invite you to help!), with the main construction work to be undertaken by contractors.

As this is being written the details of the construction phase remain vague but the plans are taking shape rapidly and will have been clarified by the time you are reading this. We can either dread the unknown, or face it in the quiet confidence that even if things are chaotic for a time, that's O.K. too.

Fortunately, the architects are as keen as we are to approach the whole project with a view to minimize the effects of the building works on the resident community and our neighbours.

There will be considerable prefabrication of parts of the building, which can be done off-site. In all it is expected that the main works will be completed within a year.

To date, much of the impetus behind the project has come from friends in Thailand. But the success of an undertaking of this magnitude relies on a broad basis of support. Over the coming months we hope to provide information to let you know how you can help in this process.

Ajahn Amaro updates the Scene in California.

A letter to Luang Por Sumedho from Ajahn Amaro, updating The Sangha on events during his visit in California.

Dear Luang Por Sumedho and fellow samanās,

Well, it has been six weeks already since we left England so I thought that I would try and bring you up to date a little: Firstly, as I sit here, we are being drenched in our fourth day of continuous rain. It has been like this since early November so the whole Bay Area has turned a very uncharacteristic green. There are days also of dazzling clarity when the storms have blown through so we are enjoying a very 'English' mood in the unpredictability and contrasts of weather.

The place that they found for us to live in has been ideal so far. We are in that area due north of the Bay which consists of broad salt-marshes and a few small wooded hills. The countryside around us is very quiet and there is a lot of wildlife nearby: birds, deer, raccoons, etc. The house we are in has an acre of garden and around us there are a few other homes, plus a couple of large riding stables. We have bumped into a few locals on almsround and have begun to receive a small daily flow of people for the morning and evening sittings. Even though it's very rural where we are it's only forty minutes drive from Berkeley or San Francisco to get here and people seem happy to make the effort necessary.

One new undertaking, due to popular request, is that we hold Dhamma discussions every other Sunday afternoon, going over the main Theravāda suttas. There is a phenomenal lack of reference to, let alone instruction in the basic teachings, whilst Vipassana and psychotherapy continue to be exalted in most circles. It's another 'thing' to be doing, but, with less outside engagements, dana, etc., there is plenty of time and it seems to be appreciated.

Venerable Khemasiri and Anagarika Tim seem to be content with their lives here; there is plenty of time to do formal practice and the schedule of events is much lighter than in previous years. We have also made a point of regularly going out on walks, into Point Reyes and to the ocean, and of going off to be alone occasionally in the many public parks and reserves around here. Being out of the city and having three of us here (four with Sr. Candāsiri when she was around) has made a big difference to the daily dynamics. Being less accessible, however, has not reduced the dana offerings and one of our on-going problems is what to do with all the excess food we get given.

The retreat that we held at Santa Rosa was, apparently, a great success with some interesting feed-back. It is quite amazing how what you have been teaching us for the last fifteen years has been avoided by a lot of the Vipassana teachers. Many of them never come near our monasteries, let alone ask you to teach, and yet on looking they find the same teaching has been here in the Theravāda tradition all along.

Sanghapala chugs along and is holding together as a group reasonably well although, as with all human groups, there have been some personality interactions and a few changes in the line-up. All in all there is a very good energy to the enterprise and a comforting pragmatism, rather than too much ideology.

Both the folks here who come to the Vihāra and the Spirit Rock/ Berkeley crowd are greatly looking forward to your visit in May and June. We have organised a public talk for you in Berkeley, at one of the halls in the University, a visit to James Baraz meditation group there, and also a talk and a day-long retreat at Spirit Rock. The ten day retreat at Cloud Mountain was booked up very quickly and I hear that they are very honoured to be able to

host you for the main West Coast 'event'.

People are also very glad to have the opportunity to meet with Ajahn Sucitto, when he visits here in March, and Ajahn Passano visiting in June. It just so happens that Ajahn Jumnien will also be here, as well as Ajahn Toon Kittipao; so it seems there will be quite a feast of forest monasticism for the West Coast palate.

Over the last few years that I have been coming here it has grown more obvious to me that people in this area do not need another teaching centre or just another local meditation group; what the area lacks is a place, off in the country, where they can join in with the lifestyle of contemplative community and train in traditional Buddhist monastic practice. If a permanent monastery is ever established here it would ideally be set it up in such a way that it provides an environment of this sort. And if the place is a bit far off the beaten track. and not so convenient for the city-dwellers to visit, I dont think that this will necessarily be a bad thing.

Another interesting perception I have encountered is the division of Buddhism into teachers and students and the idea that the role of monks and nuns is to simply to become teachers of meditation. Because of this I feel it is important to offer the principle of monasticism as an process in itself, and emphasize that teaching is a by-product, not vice versa.

In closing I would just like to say that it continues to be an enormous delight to live the bhikkhu life and to let its light warm the lives of others. I also feel inexpressibly grateful to my teachers for their immutable commitment to the Path and the guidance that has been offered over the years.

Yours in Dhamma,
Amaro Bhikkhu

Recent Developments at Cittaviveka

The least-welcome sign of change at Cittaviveka recently has been the retirement of Mike Holmes from the position of Warden of Hammer Woods. Mike, who just turned 66 last year, attributes it to the great devadhuta of age chasing around the hilly land that the Sangha were given 16 years ago, and which thanks to him has been substantially re-afforested, was getting a bit much.

We should have expected it, but Mike's terrific energy which left men twenty years younger standing belied his age. Not to mention his enthusiasm. We have little cause to begrudge him some leisure: he freely gave nine years of service, personally planted, or supervised the planting of, thousands of trees, arranged for conservation volunteers to work in the woods, organised logging contractors to cut the chestnut coppice that gave Cittaviveka (and for a while, Amaravati) its supplies of free fuel, erected three kilometers of rabbit-proof fencing with one helper, and in many ways tended to the gradual re-establishment of wildlife habitat.

With Mike it was all an act of love, the enthusiasm of which was often more communicable to us 'townies' (to whom wildlife was something we'd seen on television) than the ecological principles involved. But he gradually educated us with slide shows and talks and guided walks around the forest - not to mention the occasional peppery admonishment! I remember looking rather bemusedly at a nondescript mire of mud and sludge that Mike had cleared of derelict trees and which he pointed out to me with glowing eyes as a 'major success'. But visiting the site a few months later, and seeing it transformed into a carnival of native wildflowers and electric-blue dragon flies, and dancing butterflies, brought his words home. He understood the source of natural vigour and beauty in the unglamorous work of clearing an overgrown bog - I always thought it was such a good metaphor for Dhamma practice!

Another good one, was his often repeated advice, "Planting trees is only the beginning. That's the bit that people get excited over. What really counts is the years of after-care. Sheltering them from wind and rabbits, weeding around them so that they don't get choked. Even then, you're bound to lose some to drought and disease". Transferred to a statement

about those who Go Forth, that certainly is the way it is.

Being the way he is, Mike left a copious and detailed management plan, the assurance that he will pull out gradually, and advice on finding his successor. I think in the latter point he's got it wrong. Mike had such a rare combination of experience, love for wildlife and the Sangha, and energy - as well as living within 100 metres of the monastery - that there can't be an adequate replacement. We'll see how the various areas of his management can be administered in the future; personally I think it will take at least three people .

Meanwhile, we will also be losing the good companionship of Ajahn Pasanno, who normally resides at Wat Pah Nanachat but who has spent the last nine months on retreat in the Hammer Woods. Even the example of a samana living contentedly in solitude would be a useful source of reflection for us all, but Ajahn Pasanno has also made himself available to give Dhamma talks from time to time, to add his understanding to our Sutta study sessions, and offer a lot of informal advice and well-being. It reminds us that experienced forest monks are one of the most precious forms of wildlife to encourage and provide habitat for!

The good news is that Nick Scott, a long-term supporter and founder-trustee of Ratanagiri Monastery, has offered his services as building manager at Cittaviveka. This is extremely opportune, as the monastery is embarking on a series of developments that are intended to provide it with an adequate workshop and garage, an ablutions block, an Abbot's kuti and reception room and a new Dhamma Hall. The current meditation room was already too small when it was completed in 1981, but the need to reconstruct the derelict Coach House into a hall that would accommodate the resident Sangha and visitors was overshadowed by the need to create an entirely new centre where retreats and events for families could be held. That centre was, of course, Amaravati, which has required a lot of energy and attention, and after ten years is just embarking on its first major building project in the shape of the temple building there.

Cittaviveka, finding its own function in relationship to Amaravati, has been the site for ordinations and the initial training in the Holy Life. More recently we have turned back to Hammer Woods to actualise the possibilities of a forest-dwelling life by providing more forest kutis (eight so far, and three more in the pipeline) and restructuring some of the monastic routines. It has generally been the case that a bhikkhu would spend his fifth Vassa on retreat in the woods; that usage has extended with residents and visiting samanas taking shorter retreats all year round. It also becomes possible for bhikkhus and siladhara to spend greater periods of each day in solitude in the forest, just coming into the main house for the meal and an afternoon's work on work days. The generally successful alms-round in Midhurst rules out the requirement to go to the house for food from time to time. This winter retreat we had four samanas on long retreat in the forest, with another eight having shorter sojourns in that abiding so recommended by the Buddha and Luang Por Chah.

All this only becomes possible through the freely-offered services of many people - our teachers, and supporters and people like Mike and Nick who can undertake the precarious task of trying to mesh the uncertain practicalities of Sangha life with the requirements of civil regulations and the material world. Despite all the changes, marvelously, miraculously it seems at times, that field of blessings remains as rich as ever.

Ajahn Sucitto

