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THIS ISSUE

Signs of Change: ■

Cover: ■ The Human Family; Ajahn Sumedho
Articles: ■ The Sima Ceremony; Ajahn Attapemo
 ■ Traceless Traces; Venerable Master Hsuan Hua
 ■ In Memory of Luang Por Jun: Pt. 2; Sr. Sanghamitta
 ■ Sutta Class; Ajahn Thiradhammo
Editorial: ■ Less Trust requires More Faith; Ajahn Sucitto

HOME ■

BACK ISSUES ■

The Human Family

From a talk originally given by Ajahn Sumedho at Amaravati and to be published in *The Mind and The Way* by Wisdom Publications later this year.

At this time, we tend to be more concerned with ourselves than with our families. This is an age in which individualism has been emphasized to the point of absurdity. The opportunity that we have to develop as individuals in the modern world is quite amazing, isn't it? Each of us has been given free rein to be a self-sufficient, independent person. We are told to be a personality, to develop our creativity, to develop our lives in any way we want as free individuals. We can do what we personally want to do, whether our family likes it or not. Now the problem with glorifying individualism as an end in itself, is that it promotes a neurotic and meaningless existence. Just being a free agent - an individual person who can do what he or she wants - can give us certain pleasant moments, and we can appreciate that in some ways. But at other times it is very depressing not to be truly related to anyone, not to be able to serve anyone. There is something in all of us, both men and women, that makes us want to give ourselves. We would all like to sacrifice or give ourselves to another person or to a cause - to something that is beyond ourselves.

Living the religious life is a giving of oneself - to the Dhamma, to God, or to whatever is the ultimate truth in a particular religion. The purpose of monasticism is to give yourself completely. You let go of the desire for personal reward or acknowledgement of any sort, just to be able to become a good monk or nun, and to give yourself totally to the refuges of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

The ideal of family life is for man and woman to join together to give themselves to each other. So the sense of being one independent person has to be sacrificed for being a couple. Then with the ensuing children, it becomes a family, and the couple has to give up everything for the children. I see how parents must surrender totally to the needs of their children, and I find it very admirable. It seems to be about 24 hours a day of continuous giving to another being. In some ways, it must be exasperating and annoying, but in other ways you can see that it is very fulfilling. You can see that parents can really give wisely, not out of necessity, but

out of real reflection and understanding of the situation. They get tremendous joy out of giving up personal interest, privacy, rights, and much more, for a helpless child.

Right now, in our culture, we have to contemplate for ourselves: "What is a relationship? How should we relate? What do we expect? What do we want or demand?"

In this present time, there's a lot of confusion about the roles of men and women, because the traditional roles are now in question. We can't take for granted that 'a man's duties are this,' and 'a woman's duties are that.' In my mother's generation, they could take that for granted, because the roles were more clearly defined. And even now, the roles are unquestioned in a more traditional society, such as the rice farming communities of Northeast Thailand. Everybody knows what they are supposed to do. The social structure, the whole way of life, is accepted as natural, as being in harmony with nature, so no one questions it.

But then, especially when you are educated, you start questioning when you leave the security of a situation. You start reading, and you start listening to other people. You hear different views and opinions, and you begin to doubt. You ask, "Does life have to be just like this, or is there some other way of looking at it? Does a woman have to be just this way? And if she changes, is she wrong or right? What should a man be? What is the duty of a mother and of a father?"

Traditional Roles.

I'd like to summarize the advice in the Pali Canon on the duties that people have in their various roles. These are the guidelines of an Asian culture from 2,500 years ago. The Sigaalaka Sutta lists the duties of parents and children, pupils and teachers, husbands and wives, friends, masters and servants, and spiritual teachers and their disciples.

The first guidelines are about parents and children.

A parent should not let the child do evil; a parent should encourage the child to do good, see that he or she receives training in the arts and sciences, find a suitable spouse for him or her, and give over their wealth at the right time. And a child, in turn, should help look after the parents' affairs, ensure the endurance of the family name, conduct himself or herself in ways that make the child worthy to receive inherited wealth, and make offerings in the parents' memory when they've died.

I don't remember ever getting advice like that. In fact, my parents said, "We want you to grow up and be completely independent of us. And for our part, we hope to save enough money so that, when we are old, we will never have to be dependent upon you." There was a sense of independence on both sides. Clearly, we have a different model for how parents and children should behave towards each other in our modern society.

The second set of guidelines is about pupils and teachers.

A pupil should stand up to receive the teacher as a sign of respect, wait in attendance on the teacher, pay attention to what the teacher says, and learn with a respectful attitude. The teacher, having been upheld in these ways, should lead a pupil well, keep nothing about the subject matter secret or undisclosed, praise the pupil among friends, and protect

and look after the pupil. Unfortunately, nowadays very few pupils receive such nurturing from a teacher, and most teachers would be surprised to receive such treatment from a pupil.

The third set of guidelines is about husbands and wives.

A husband should praise his wife, affirming that she is truly his wife; he should not look down on her; he should not be unfaithful; he should let her be in charge of the home, family, and money; and he should give her trinkets and adornments. A wife, in her turn, should organize the family affairs well, help the husband's relatives and friends, not be unfaithful, look after the family property, and be energetic in her duties. This is the advice for a traditional marriage; it presents an ideal of what each partner was expected to do. These were the guidelines for a cooperative relationship, in which there could be mutual support and respect, rather than independence, rights, and conflicts.



The fourth set of guidelines is about the relationship between two friends.

One should share things with a friend, talk pleasantly, do things that are useful, be even-minded without pride, and speak truthfully without pretention. In return, the friend should give protection when one has been careless, protect one's property when one has been careless, give shelter when there is danger, not abandon one in a time of adversity, and uphold one along with one's relatives.

The fifth set of guidelines is about masters and servants.

A master should arrange a servant's work so that it is suitable and in accordance with their strength, give them food and rewards, look after them and nurse them when they are sick, share unusual or tasty delicacies with them, and give them time off. A servant should get up in the morning and start work before the master, finish work after the master, take away as their own only what the master gives them (in other words, not steal from him), constantly try to do better work, and praise the virtues of the master.

The final set of guidelines is about the relationship between spiritual teachers and their disciples.

A spiritual teacher should encourage a disciple to do good, help them with a compassionate mind, tell them things they had not previously heard, make clear things they had already heard, and tell them how to attain the heavenly realms. A disciple should support the teacher, through loving-kindness, with actions of body, actions of speech, and actions of mind. In addition, the disciple should not forbid the teacher to enter his or her house, and the disciple should provide the requisites of food, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

These guidelines represent the traditional Buddhist advice regarding relationships. But right now, in our culture, we have to contemplate for ourselves: "What is a relationship? How should we relate? What do we expect? What do we want or demand? And what are we willing to give?" We have to ask ourselves these questions, and consider whether we know how to relate to another person.

Finding Balance Without Traditional Roles.

If we come from an idealistic position, such as, "We are all equal, we are all exactly the same, there is no difference," then in various situations it's difficult to relate, isn't it? Who's going to do the dishes? Who's going to empty the dustbin? Who is going to lead? Who is going to follow? If we all feel that we are the same, then we can become confused because we don't know how to relate to each other in a structure or in a hierarchy of duties and responsibilities. So sometimes, if we are attached to the ultimate view of equality and freedom, we can become very confused, disgruntled, and even threatened by the practical side of life.

In the practice of Dhamma, we are opening the mind to the way things actually are. We begin to notice that nature itself is hierarchical, that there is always form or structure, and that when you have form, you are always going to have sequence. One is always going to be followed by two, and two is always going to be followed by three; A is followed by B, and B is followed by C. You can't say A is the same as B. If you spelled everything with an A, it would be meaningless, wouldn't it? In the conditioned world we recognize that there are sequences.

Now if we take a fixed position on hierarchy, we become tyrannical. Someone who says that they have to be the boss at all times - always number one and never number two - becomes a tyrant. But, on the other hand, an idealistic egalitarian, someone who says that we must always be equal and always the same, is setting up the situation for confusion and contention. When it's time for a meal, everyone wants to be first in line. But if we are willing to designate a sequence, we can relate to that sequence. That's a relationship, isn't it? You are relating as being senior or junior, teacher or student, parent or child. A sequence provides a structure for relationships, so that we know how to live with each other without endless conflicts and confusion.

In the monastic life we have a particular form and structure, to which we all agree. It's a voluntary life. It would be a tyranny if everyone were forced to become monks and nuns and live within the structure. But because people join the community by choice, it is not a tyranny; it's a cooperative, harmonious way of living.

You can apply these principles to family life. If you, as mother and father or husband and wife, do not decide on some clear guidelines for duties and responsibilities, then who is going to do what? Who is going to go to work? Who is going to stay home? Who is going to do the dishes? Who is going to take care of the children when they are ill? What are our duties and responsibilities in relating to each other in a family?

Nowadays, a relationship between a man and a woman can tend to be a competition, because there are no guidelines for mutual respect and understanding. You can see that in some marriages, where the husband and wife are competing with each other. They feel that they have to prove that one is as good as the other, or better than the other. But how can you have a family relationship with a competitor? The purpose of family is to live as a unit where there is harmony, where you've established enough agreement to let you relate to each other in a decent way in everyday life.

In a traditional society, the agreements are made by the society. But now we all choose our mates - who we are going to marry, who we are going to live with, who we are going to have a relationship with. Oftentimes we base that choice only on personal preference in the moment, rather than wise reflection on what kind of person would most be suitable for us to live with. We might choose the one who is most attractive, most charming, wealthiest, or most interesting at the moment. Or we might just need support: a man might be looking for a maternal woman, a mother who is going to replace his own mother; a woman might be looking for a father, some strong protective man who will take care of her.

Often these desires are never really acknowledged because of our idealism. We think we are going to have the perfect relationship, based on total honesty. By 'total honesty,' people tend to mean saying exactly what they think whenever they feel like it, which to me is a description of a hell realm! I am really grateful that I don't say all the things I think. Sometimes what one is thinking should not be repeated; it would only cause pain, confusion, fear, and depression in the minds of those listening.

The way of mindfulness is the way of allowing ourselves to open up to the situation. Rather than waiting for the perfect person, or thinking you have to get rid of the one you are with because you're not getting on, or thinking that you can find someone better, you can contemplate how to use the situation. You can reflect that this is the way it is, rather than expecting somebody to change or blaming yourself because you can't live up to your high ideals. So you become more aware of the way life actually is, the way it has to be, whether you like it or don't like it. This is the way of reflection, of mindfulness. You are not demanding happiness, or even fulfillment, from the world, but you are willing to take on the challenge that exists by beginning to work with life. Now you can only do this kind of reflection by yourself - you cannot expect someone else to tell you what you should do in your relationship, because there are so many things to take into account. Only you know them all.

For example, many people ask themselves, "Should I just live my life for myself, for my own development, even at the expense of the people who are close to me? Or should I give up any hope of ever developing myself, in order to further their welfare?" Those are the two extremes: the selfish extreme and the self-sacrificing extreme. Self-sacrificing sounds noble, doesn't it? It sounds like something we should be doing. And selfishness sounds like something we shouldn't be doing. We think it's not nice, it's wrong, to be selfish. But the Buddhist position is not an intimidating one, saying we should be totally self-sacrificing and unselfish; it encourages us to open up to that very selfishness, or to our desire to sacrifice ourselves.

We can contemplate this in our own lives. For example, instead of thinking of ourselves as selfish and then feeling guilty about it, or being caught up in the other extreme of endless giving, nurturing, and caring for others, without taking any time for ourselves, we can recognize our inclination, whatever it is. Then, having recognized it, we can look at it without judging it and try to reach a balance.

Using Opposites for Spiritual Development.

We can begin to see that family life can be regarded as a symbol for inner spiritual development, because the family is a religious archetype. In Christian symbolism, we have God the father, Mary the mother, and Christ the child. In other religions, we might have the Divine Father and the Earth Mother symbolizing the marriage between the heavens and the earth. When you begin to really look at yourself, you find there is both a mother and a father inside, and these opposites can be reflected upon as part of your spiritual practice.

You find that just the fact that you have a female body or a male body doesn't mean that everything about you is totally female or totally male. What we need to open up to in spiritual development is the opposite; a man needs to open up to the female within, and a woman needs to open up to the male. This is not an easy thing to do, but we can use the external presence of the opposite gender to help in our practice. When a man sees a woman, or a woman sees a man, they can use the external characteristics as reminders. In a monastic community where there are monks and nuns, rather than getting involved in relationships, monks can see the external female, and they can begin to acknowledge the feminine qualities that they find internally. And for the nuns, it's the same: they can find the masculine qualities within.

My own experience as a monk, from the masculine side, is that men usually have a lot of

drive; they are quite aggressive and have a lot of will power. So you often find monks becoming internally aggressive to themselves. They try to exterminate anger, destroy fear, wipe out jealousy, and annihilate lust. But where does that get you? You get so stiff that your head aches. You become internally sterilized; you are just dried up like a parched desert. There is nothing, no emotion – just will power sitting there. You develop a lot of strength that way, because it does take a lot of strength to maintain that attitude for any length of time, but it is also fragile in the sense that it can be easily upset. It becomes very dependent on blind will, not on wisdom or love - not on anything that is malleable, flexible, and receptive.

So until a monk begins to open up to the inner female, he has no balance. For a man to learn to be a receptive, sensitive being, he has to stop using his will power and forcing issues all the time. He has to let go of things and become kind, gentle, and patient with himself - and with others. He needs to learn how to be extremely patient with the people he finds irritating.

One time Ajahn Chah pointed this out to me, when I was going through one of those phases of will power. There was one monk in the monastery who really irritated me. I couldn't bear him. Just at the sound of his voice, I would feel aversion arising in my mind. I asked Ajahn Chah what to do, and he said, "Ah, that monk is very good for you. He's your real friend. All those nice friends, those other bhikkhus that you get on so well with, they aren't very good for you. It's that one who's really going to help you." Because Ajahn Chah was a wise man, I considered seriously what he said. And I began to see that somehow I had to just totally accept that monk - accept the irritation - and let him be as he was. The masculine energy always tends to want to set someone right: 'Let me tell you what's wrong with you.' But to find the feminine quality of acceptance - to just sit there and let that monk be irritating and to bear with the inner irritation - I had to learn how to be patient. I began to understand what it meant to find that balance within, because I could see that I had been out of balance.

And it seems that for women the imbalance tends to be the opposite. Oftentimes they would rather be accepting of everything, no matter what it is. They are often willing to be told what they should do next. But to relate to the inner male, a woman needs to find that in herself which she can trust - that which is strong within her, that which is guiding - instead of waiting for some external authority figure to tell her what she should do. I see that it's difficult for many women to trust in their own strength. Often they find a lack of confidence in themselves. It takes the willingness not to just wait and be receptive to things as they come, but to be firm in a situation. In general, a woman needs to develop a sense of strength; she must trust in being wise, rather than waiting for some external wise person to direct her.

We need to be reminded of our opposite, don't we. So we can use the external balance, the external male and female, as reminders of the internal male and female. One can use a marital relationship or a monastic situation wisely in this way. If you forget and become lost in your habitual tendencies, then whenever you see the opposite, that is a chance to remember. Rather than just seeing the opposite through the eyes of sexual attraction, or desire, or judgment, or just through the discriminative faculty, you can use the situation to remind yourself to open up within. That way, for a man, all women can be symbols for the internal female, so there can be a sense of respect for all women, because they represent that symbol. I assume that men can serve the same symbolic function for women.

Question: How about non-attachment within a relationship?

Answer: First you must recognize what attachment is, and then you let go. That's when you realize non-attachment. However, if you're coming from the view that you shouldn't be attached, then that's still not it. The point is not to take a position against attachment, as if there were a commandment against it; the point is to observe. We ask the questions, "What is attachment? Does being attached to things bring happiness or suffering?" Then we begin to have insight. We begin to see what attachment is, and then we can let go.

If you're coming from a high-minded position in which you think that you shouldn't be attached to anything, then you come up with ideas like, "Well, I can't be a Buddhist because I love my wife - because I'm attached to my wife. I love her, and I just can't let her go. I can't send her away." Those kinds of thoughts come from the view that you shouldn't be attached.

The recognition of attachment doesn't mean that you get rid of your wife. It means you free yourself from wrong views about yourself and your wife. Then you find that there's love there, but it's not attached. It's not distorting, clinging, and grasping. The empty mind is quite capable of caring about others and loving in the pure sense of love. But any attachment will always distort that.

If you love somebody and then start grasping them, it tends to go off; then what you love gives you pain. For example, you love your children, but if you become attached to them, then you don't really love them any more, because you're not with them as they are. You have all kinds of ideas about what they should be and what you want them to be. You want them to obey you, and you want them to be good, and you want them to pass their exams. With this attitude, you're not really loving them – because if they don't fulfill your wishes, you feel angry and frustrated and averse to them. So attachment to children prevents us from loving them. But as we let go of attachment, we find that our natural way of relating is to love. We find that we are able to be aware of our children as they are, rather than having fixed ideas of what we want them to be.

When I talk to parents, they say how much suffering there is in having children, because there's a lot of wanting. When we're wanting them to be a certain way and not wanting them to be another way, we create this anguish and suffering in our minds. But the more we let go of that, the more we discover an amazing ability to be sensitive to, and aware of, children as they are. Then, of course, that openness allows them to respond, rather than just react to our attachment. You know, a lot of children are just reacting to our saying, "I want you to be like this."

The empty mind - the pure mind - is not a blank, zero-land, where you're not feeling or caring about anything. It's an effulgence of the mind. It's a brightness that is truly sensitive and accepting. It's an ability to accept life as it is. When we accept life as it is, we can respond appropriately to the way we're experiencing it, rather than just reacting out of fear and aversion.



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■ In Memory of Luang Por Jun: Pt. 2; Sr. Sanghamitta

■ Sutta Class; Ajahn Thiradhammo

Editorial: ■ Less Trust requires More Faith; Ajahn Sucitto**HOME** ■**BACK ISSUES** ■

The Sima Ceremony

Ajahn Attapemo reviews some aspects of this historic event: The creation of the sima boundary at Amaravati.

On 14th August 1995 many of the ordained Sangha from Devon, Harnham and Chithurst gathered together at Amaravati to formally enact the Sangha procedure to establish a Sima. This creates a designated area within the new Temple building at Amaravati in which special Sangha functions may take place, such as the fortnightly Patimokkha recitation, and the Upasampada and Pabbajja ordination ceremonies.

In May of this year, three months before the Sima ceremony, we celebrated the Ground Breaking for the building of the new Temple at Amaravati in a very memorable ceremony. Hundreds of friends gathered to watch as the Sri Lankan and Thai Ambassadors took a hoe to the earth and removed the first bit of soil. It was a wonderful day that required much preparation and planning, and it left a strong feeling that the Temple will be for us all.

Venerable Sirs, may the Sangha listen to me.

By contrast, the Sima ceremony had to be timed to fit in with the digging of the temple foundations. Since we expected the ground of the site would be very uneven with gaping trenches, we felt that it would be hazardous to have too many people attending. We decided to conduct a simple ceremony, primarily for the Sangha.

Nonetheless, it felt very auspicious to have in attendance three of the most senior elders of the Theravada Sangha in Britain: Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma, Ven. Dr. Vajiragnana, and Ven. Phra Kru Silananda. These three elders represent the Burmese, Sri Lankan and Thai Sanghas in Britain, and they have each been particularly helpful giving us guidance and support throughout our 18 years in Britain. It also worked out well that the Family Dhamma Camp was in mid-stride, so that at short notice, many could join in.

What Actually Happened?

The actual ceremony comprised three parts: first removing any old sima boundaries, second, designating the boundary markers and third, the formal motion and announcement to the Sangha to establish the Sima.

For the first part the Sangha gathered on each of seven squares to formally terminate any old agreement for a Sima to be located there. Though it is highly unlikely there could ever have been a Sima in Hertfordshire, we decided to add it in for good measure. All of the twenty-seven bhikkhus gathered on each square while two bhikkhus recited a Pali formula to relinquish the old Sima. Then they all moved onto each of the other six squares, and each time recited the formula.

For the second stage, the main features were the eight spherical marker stones specially carved by Ken Grant, a stone mason and supporter of Harnham. (Ken's becoming a Sima expert after carving a set of 8 stones for the Harnham Vihara.) Monks, nuns and lay people all helped roll each stone into it's final position. Then Luang Por Sumedho and George Sharp went round to formally point out these stones, designating them as marking the north, northeast, east, etc. around the eight cardinal points.

The third stage was the heart of the Sima ceremony. Here all the monks gathered together in the centre of the designated area and again two of them recited the formal motion and one announcement to say:

"Venerable Sirs, may the Sangha listen to me. The marks all around have been designated. If the Sangha is prepared, the Sangha should [now] determine a boundary for common communion and a single observance in accordance with these marks. This is the motion.

Venerable sirs, may the Sangha listen to me. With the marks all around designated, the Sangha is determining a boundary for a common communion and a single observance in accordance with these marks. If each of the Venerable ones agrees to the determination of a boundary for common communion and a single observance in accordance with these marks, he should be silent. He who does not agree should speak.

The Sangha has determined the boundary for a common communion and a single observance in accordance with these marks. This is agreeable to the Sangha, therefore it is silent. Thus do I hold it."

This completed the Bhikkhu Sangha's establishment of the Sima.

A second chant was also done to allow the Sangha the use of the area at times when they are not wearing, or in close proximity, to all of the three robes; which means the Sima can be used informally as well as formally.

By the end of the ceremony many of the children and parents from the Family Camp had gathered around and all joined in to chant the Karaniyametta sutta.

An Historic Event

Designating the Sima boundary was first introduced by the Lord Buddha as a means to encourage the unity and harmony of the Sangha. Simas could be large, including a whole monastery or even a village, and all the bhikkhus within that Sima would be obliged to hold



The ground is broken - at the centre of the new Temple site.

their formal meetings together in the one place. A small Sima is often dedicated to one building. this would enable these Sangha acts to be easily carried out without being annulled by a passing bhikkhu turning up unexpectedly.

In a year's time, when the Temple at Amaravati is hopefully complete, this new Sima boundary will be marked out on the floor inside. There, every fortnight, the Sangha will gather for the Uposatha recitation of the Patimokkha, as well as for the occasional Upasampada and Pabbajja ordination ceremonies.

Throughout the 2500 years since the time of the Buddha, such ceremonies have always been an outward sign that the life of the Sangha continues. Here in the West, with the building of a temple and a Sima, it feels like the Sangha in Britain (and Europe) is flourishing and putting down roots. And in future this occasion may be seen as an historic event.

What's Next?

At the completion of the new Temple, an occasion is planned, perhaps in 1997 or 1998, for a Grand Opening Ceremony. This is the time for lowering into place a ninth Sima stone, called (in Thai) the 'look-nimit'. It is customary to have a great deal of pomp and ceremony for such an event, and we would hope to invite many of the significant elders from Thailand who have been supporting us over the years: The Sangharaja, Somdet Buddhajahn - Luang Por's Preceptor. Also, we hope that Princess Galyani Watthana (the sister of the King of Thailand) will come, for she will be invited to cut the supports holding the 'look-nimit' over its hole, thereby allowing it to fall into its final place. Although the 'look-nimit' is not required by the Vinaya, this has become the custom in Thailand to celebrate the establishment of a Sima and the completion of an Uposatha Hall.

And so, Ken Grant will soon be going to India, for he felt it would be particularly auspicious to have the ninth stone come from the land where the Buddha's teaching originated.



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Traceless Traces

The Funeral of Venerable Master Hsuan Hua - his teachings
~ Ajahn Sucitto ~

After the cremation, scatter my ashes in the air. I do not want you to do anything else at all for me...I came into the world without anything; when I depart I still do not want anything, and I do not want to leave any traces in the world. I came from empty space, and I will also return to empty space....

extracts from the Venerable Master's Final instructions

On July 24th, Luang Por Sumedho, Ajahn Sucitto and Sister Sanghamitta flew to California on the invitation of Dharma Realm Buddhist Association to attend the funeral ceremonies around Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, whose decease was reported in the last issue of the Newsletter. They were met in Los Angeles by Ajahns Amaro and Thanavaro who were about to enter their three-month retreat in Northern California. After some ceremonies in Long Beach, the party went north to the City of 10,000 Buddhas, to join an assembly of 1,000 people, lay and ordained, in the culminating rites.

Reflections and contemplation in the presence of death are of great value: they help us to re-establish Right View, to affirm our aspirations and perhaps to make new and deeper commitments to the Path. When the funeral is of a great Dharma Master, in the presence of a Maha Sangha, the effect is greatly magnified.

It would take a long essay to bring across the events in anything like a meaningful way. We were all warmly and respectfully invited into the heart of the proceedings, which despite the unfamiliar ritual and Chinese chanting were inspirational in the reverence and aspiration that they conveyed. And the message of death is simple enough for anyone who chooses to look clearly:

Leaves fall & return to the root: one sees the original source. This fleeting life is but a dream – completely without traces. In this one dream, there is nothing at all. When the illusion ends, the truth continues to exist.

Presiding Master Ming Yang uttered this short poem before the casket containing the Master's body was sealed; and then added:

His spirit is unextinguished, equal to empty space, The original owner of this person. Neither going nor coming, perpetually unmoving, The green mountains have always been in the white clouds.

Cultivating the Way simply means to "turn ourselves around." Doing It Just Right is the Middle Way

After the casket had been carried to the cremation site, along streets of the City lined with people, it was burned. The next day, in the blazing morning sun, the ashes were carried into the air by a huge hot air balloon and scattered. A cloud of dust drifted and dissolved gently in an almost imperceptible breeze. Apart from the many monasteries, hermitages and disciples that the Master has left in the world, are records of his commentaries on Sutras and many Dharma talks. We print extracts from a couple of them below.

Cultivating the Way simply means to "turn ourselves around."

What is Buddhadharma? Buddhadharma is simply worldly dharma, but it's a variety of worldly dharma that most people are unwilling to use. Worldly people are always busy running here and there, constantly hurried and agitated. The source of all this activity is invariably selfishness, motivated by a concern to protect one's life and possessions. Buddhadharma, on the other hand, is unselfish and public-spirited, and springs from a wish to benefit others. As we learn the Buddhadharma, our every action gradually comes to include in its scope a concern for others. The ego gradually loses its importance. We should give up our own interests in service to others and avoid bringing affliction to others. These are the hallmarks of Buddhadharma. But most people fail to clearly understand these basic ideas. As a result, within Buddhist circles we find struggle and contention, troubles and hassles, quarrels and strife. We find an atmosphere not at all different from that of ordinary people. Sometimes the relationships within Buddhist groups don't even measure up to the standards of ordinary social conduct. Such people study Buddhism on the one hand and create offences on the other. They do good deeds, and in the next breath destroy the merit and virtue they've earned. Instead of advancing the cause of Buddhism, such behaviour actually harms it. The Buddha referred to such people as 'parasites on the lion, feeding off the lion's flesh.'

We Buddhist disciples cannot expect any results from our cultivation if we're selfish and profiteering, unable to put things down and see through our attachments. The motto of Buddhists must be:

*Truly recognize your own faults,
And don't discuss others' wrongs.
Others wrongs are just my own:
Being of one substance with all
things is called Great Compassion.*

If we want to thoroughly understand the truths of Buddhism, then we must first cultivate patience and giving. Then we can come to accomplishment. We must turn ourselves



around and be different from ordinary people. We can no longer flow along with the turbid currents of the world. Cultivating the Way simply means to 'turn ourselves around.' What is that? It means to 'give desirable situations and benefits to other people, while absorbing the unfavourable situations ourselves.' We renounce the petty self in order to bring to perfection the greater self.

All disciples who have taken refuge with me are like the flesh and blood of my own body. No matter which piece of flesh is severed from my body, it hurts me just the same. No matter where I bleed, the wound injures my constitution. Because of this, all of you must unite together. To make Buddhism expand and flourish, you must take a loss in places where most people are unable to sustain a loss.

You must endure the insults that ordinary people find unendurable. Expand the measure of your minds, and be true in your actions. When you're not trying to be true, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are aware of it. No one can cheat them. Each of you should examine your own faults and earnestly remedy the flaws in your character. Truly recognize where in the past you've been upside-down and where your behavior has departed from principle. Be honest, forget about yourself, and work for the sake of all of Buddhism and all of society.

Doing It Just Right is the Middle Way

In the Dharma-door of investigating Chan, you must fix your attention on what you are doing. At all times, you should return the light and reflect within. Don't be too tense, and don't be too slack. It's said,

Too tight, and it'll break. Too slack, and it'll be loose. Neither tight nor slack, and it will turn out right.

But neither tense nor slack is the Middle Way. Walking, standing, sitting and lying down, don't be apart from this. Once you leave this, you have missed it. What is this? It's the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way.

In investigating Chan, you must be impartial, not leaning to one side. Don't go too far, and don't fail to go far enough. If you go too far, or not far enough, it's not the Middle Way. If you don't fall into the two extremes of emptiness and existence, then that's the Middle Way. It's said, 'The Middle Way is neither emptiness nor existence.' It is True Emptiness and Wonderful Existence. Do not be attached to true emptiness, and do not be obstructed by wonderful existence, for true emptiness and wonderful existence cannot be grasped or renounced. You cannot take hold of them or let go of them. That's the true emptiness and wonderful existence.

When you are applying effort, you should finish what you start; only then will you accomplish anything. As it's said, "Carry it through from beginning to end." You shouldn't "put it in the sun for one day and freeze it for ten," retreat in the face of difficulty, or give up halfway - that's the behavior of people without backbone. The ancients said,

In cultivation, don't be afraid to go slowly. Just be afraid of standing still.

In your daily investigation of Chan, be mindful of your own meditation topic, and slash through all your idle thoughts with your Vajra-jewelled sword of wisdom. When idle thinking is severed, wisdom will arise. With the light of wisdom, you can smash through the gloom of ignorance. Once ignorance is smashed, you can transcend the Three Realms, escape birth and death, and crash your way out of the wheel of life (i.e. the twelve links of conditioned co-production).

Those who apply effort in cultivating the Way must have patience. No matter how hard it is, you must patiently bear it. With patience you can reach the other shore. So in joining this Chan Session, you all should not be afraid of hardship. It's said, "When bitterness ends, sweetness comes." If you don't start at the very bottom, you can't reach the top. Remember that a ten thousand foot skyscraper is built from the ground up. It isn't built in mid-air. Therefore, Chan cultivators must start with the basics, which are to get rid of idle thinking. If you can stop your idle thoughts, then at that point,

The moon appears in the waters of a pure heart; There are no clouds in the sky of a calm mind.

When the heart is at peace, all problems go away. When the mind is still, the myriad things are in harmony. As it is said:

True wealth is stopping the mind and cutting off thought: True fields of blessings are devoid of all selfish desires.

One investigates Chan just to get rid of the false and keep the true. It is also to pan for gold, to look for gold dust in the sand, which is a difficult task. But if you want to find gold, you have to look in the sand, and be patient. Do you want to understand your inherent Buddha-nature? Do you want to understand your mind and see your nature? Then you must patiently cultivate, study and investigate, and when enough time has passed, you will suddenly penetrate and enlighten to the fact that it is originally this way!

Both extracts from Venerable Master Hua's "Talks on Dharma: Volume 1", published by Buddhist Text Translation Society, Burlingame, California.

"My intent is not to contend with anyone for fame or benefit. If there is any advantage that other people want, I don't want it. What others don't want, I pick up. The Buddha treated everyone with kindness, compassion, joy and giving. He didn't exclude or give up on anyone. Even though I'm not the Buddha, I want to learn to be like the Buddha."



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■ In Memory of Luang Por Jun: Pt. 2; Sr. Sanghamitta

■ Sutta Class; Ajahn Thiradhammo

Editorial: ■ Less Trust requires More Faith; Ajahn Sucitto**HOME****BACK ISSUES**

In Memory of Luang Por Jun - Part 2

Sister Sanghamitta concludes her reflections on the life of Luang Por Jun who died in Ubon Rajathani on April 2nd this year.

In 1987, I spent the Vassa at Wat Beung Kao Luang. As in most branch monasteries of Wat Nong Pah Pong, the Sangha enters the Vassa with the same ceremony as we do here in the UK, announcing one's commitment to spend the three months in the Wat and taking nissaya (dependence) on the teacher. Those monks and nuns who intend to do some of the dhutanga (austerity) practices would also announce their resolution to do so for one, two or three months. Some of the nuns would keep noble silence, or eat only out of the almsbowl (no separate dishes) and mix all the food together; or they would do the sitters' practice (not to lie down). Some would not eat on Wan Phra, or they would fast for one or two weeks, and so on. I picked up the chan dok bat practice, only to eat what is given in my almsbowl during pindapata.

During the Vassa, the villagers, out of their deep respect for Luang Por Jun and his disciples, would prepare extra food to offer into the bowls during the almsround, since they knew that some of us wouldn't accept any other food later on inside the monastery. But Luang Por was concerned that I might not get enough food. Usually he wouldn't go out for almsround, since he was very weak, and in the early morning he would rest. But one morning, after two weeks, he came along to the village. Since he was the first in line followed by about twenty monks, I did not hear of this directly, but later I learned that he had told the lay people not to put everything into the bhikkhus' bowls, but to make sure that they had some goodies left to give into the nuns' almsbowls (meaning me). He even asked at the house of a relative for them to prepare some special food with eggs and fruit and bring it to the gate of the monastery. On our way back, all of a sudden, a girl with a bicycle arrived out of breath and gave him a bag with food. He turned around and put it straight into my almsbowl! This is only one of the many examples of how Luang Por Jun would always care for everybody, being alert to the nuns' needs, sharing the requisites freely with them, and giving medical support.

Again and again, he would encourage the lay people to practise sincerely, to really work on their defilements and purify their hearts. obvious.

The senior nuns used to tell the story of how, in the early days, when the community was short of food, Luang Por became anxious that the nuns at the end of the line wouldn't get enough to eat. He then asked the laity at the meal time to offer the pots to the junior nuns first and then pass them up the line so that the nuns and novices ate first, followed by the monks and himself last ... a most unconventional and courageous act of his great compassion!

At Wat Beung Kao Luang, the sisters have their own communal life in the nuns' section: a nice Sala (with mosquito screens on the doors and windows - indeed a

blessing and privilege, which the monks have to miss!) Every nun has her own kuti, balcony, bathing facilities and lavatory. In those days, they even had electricity - long before Wat Pah Nanachat. Luang Por used to come regularly to give exhortation and encouragement for them to keep practising towards liberation. In the evening, he often gave us the space to do our own practice, walking or sitting meditation. It was up to each individual to decide how they would use their time; but whether one practised in the group or vivek (alone), the atmosphere was very spacious. And, from time to time Luang Por would change the schedule or other things to keep us on our toes, to keep the mai nehr practice alive; mai nehr means 'not sure'. So one wasn't able to sink into habitual ruts for too long.

One day, early in the morning, after the last stroke of the three a.m. bell, Luang Por made an announcement through the loud-speaker and said: "Sister Sanghamitta, make yourself ready, you and Sister Samlee will go along with me and a couple of monks on a trip for two weeks." Within ten minutes, we had to prepare ourselves to travel around the country (up North) for two weeks. And this, at 3 a.m. I really had to let go of any Western conditioning very quickly, about needing to prepare everything perfectly and be in control ... And then, having made everything ready, thinking we were going somewhere, we would have to wait one hour, two, three hours until it began to look like "maybe tomorrow..." On this trip, it was interesting to see how Luang Por not only looked after his own monastery but also, on the way to Chiang Mai, many other branch monasteries. He would drop in on them, often in the middle of nowhere, and talk with the monks and laity, sorting out difficulties and helping to clear up any misunderstandings between them. His light and cheerful way, combined with a strong determination, brought joy and encouragement to people wherever he went. And his ability to sort things out usually helped people to clear away resentments, as well as to re-establish harmony and concord where beforehand there had been conflict.



This quality of Luang Por Jun's could also be felt in his desanas (talks). In the meetings at Wat Pah Pong, such as for Luang Por Chah's birthday, and later the ceremonies around the funeral - his talks were not only inspiring but he was also able to say things which nobody else had the courage or sensitivity to speak about; and he did so in a way that they could receive. This was one of his real gifts - his ability to bring difficulties to light, to say what was needed when something wasn't right in the community - whether in his own monastery or at Wat Nong Pah Pong - and it is one of the many reasons why he was so well-loved and respected.

The tradition in the Wat Nong Pah Pong monasteries is to have all-night vigils on the Wan

Phra(Observance days). Often Luang Por would go up on the high seat and give a desana(talk) for several hours; even at times when he was in physical pain. The amazing thing was that it was really refreshing, because he did not lecture, rather when he spoke, pure Dhamma poured out in a joyful way.

In the beginning, I tried hard to understand because my Thai wasn't very good. Sometimes I would get stuck trying to figure out the meaning of the words. Finally, I realised that there was no need to understand verbatim, that I could relax, sit and listen to the flow of Dhamma. In this way, I experienced being showered by pure Dhamma. I was often 'blissed out', so to speak, sitting on the concrete floor with a thin bamboo mat, in the polite posture (no cushion) for four hours or longer with no signs of pain or tiredness. It became just a natural meditative way to enjoy Dhamma and the whole presence and atmosphere around it.

During these all-night sittings, quite a lot of lay people who came regularly on the Wan Phra would sit at the back of the Sala. Often they would help during the day with digging, or cleaning, working hard, so that by midnight some would fall asleep or even snore. Sometimes Luang Por Jun would bring them back to life with a little song, cheer them up with a joke or point out the urgency of getting rid of the 'kilet' (defilements).

One of the wonderful things about Luang Por Jun, as well as Luang Por Chah and all of his disciples, was that, again and again, he would encourage the lay people to practise sincerely, to really work on their defilements and purify their hearts. He would constantly give them the support and encouragement they needed for their spiritual growth.

It is very impressive to see the results of the many, many years of these great spiritual teachers sharing the fruits of their own practice with the lay people. At the ceremonies around Luang Por Chah's passing away - the first seven days, the 50th and 100th day, and the actual funeral after one year - there were hundreds of thousands of lay people and devoted disciples whose very presence expressed their gratitude and respect. In no other Buddhist country have I ever seen so many people meditating, helping each other and working together so peacefully. There was not one penny (baht) to be seen inside the monastery - everything was offered for free distribution - not only food for the monastic Sangha but also food and drinks for any visitors and passing guests etc. No one could get rid of money except by going outside the monastery walls; such was the deep sense of togetherness and maturity of both monks and lay people, in the way that they worked together for that which is good, true and beautiful. There was truly the understanding that we can best express our gratitude and respect for our teachers by putting their teaching into practice.

There are not many of us here now who met Luang Por Jun when he came to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery from July 1989 to June 1990 for a rest. While he was with us, he showed that same openness and interest in the Western Sangha life. His strong silent presence conveyed metta and sati, and his frequent reflections on Dhamma and community life were both a delight and a support for all of us. Also during his time in the UK, he offered his gift for bringing harmony in times of conflict and whenever the situation arose, he was there to help us come together and support each other on the Path. But even more than that, what he did for all of us, for those of us who knew him and those of us who only know of him, was to provide a living testimony of the power of this practice to transform a human being.

In the last years of his life, Luang Por experienced a great deal of illness and pain (stomach ulcer and liver cancer). But even when he had to endure severe physical pain, he always maintained a very calm demeanour. He never complained and even joked with people who came to visit him, "If I live, that's fine, if I die, that's fine too", he would say. Nothing would stop him from talking to the lay people or giving desanas - no illness, pain or tiredness. Often after a long day, he would continue to offer his experience and his knowledge of Dhamma for

the benefit of all his devotees.

Luang Por sometimes would say: "Poot mahg roo noi, Poot noi roo mahg!" which means: 'one who speaks a lot doesn't know much and one who speaks little knows much!' So, even if I know only little, I won't speak too much - that's enough for now - Evam.



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Sutta Class: Ethical Causality and Morality

Ajahn Thiradhammo reflects on the law of Kamma and the roots of wholesome and unwholesome action.

The basis of morality in Buddhism is the 'Law of Kamma', or ethical conditional causality. In a rather over-simplistic form this may be expressed as: 'good actions give a pleasant result, evil actions give an unpleasant result'. Or in the words of a scriptural passage:

Mind precedes all things,
 Mind is supreme, produced by mind are they.
 If one should speak or act with mind defiled,
 Suffering will follow,
 Just as wheel-follows-hoof of the drawing ox.
 If one should speak or act with mind purified,
 Well-being will follow,
 Like a never-parting shadow.

Dhammapada 1 - 2

Ethical conditional causality means that there is a definite cause and effect relationship functioning within human activity and, since human beings are continuously acting, this relationship is subject to a variety of conditions or influencing factors, such as the quality of mind. In order to understand the principle of ethical causality it is necessary to clearly comprehend the distinction between action kamma and result vipaka. Failure to make this distinction leads to the equating of action and result, ending in determinism or fatalism. However, the Buddha said that if one must reap the result of all actions then there is no possibility to realise liberation *A.I,249*.

The main point is that action has a potential to give a result. When further related action is engaged in, another potential is created which may then have an effect upon the previous potential, correspondingly altering the result. And, since we are continuously acting and reacting, the results of any specific action are extremely hard to determine, so much so that the Buddha is quoted as saying:

The results of kamma are unthinkable and should not be speculated about. Thinking thus, one would come to distraction and distress. *A.II,80*

Therefore, Ananda, kamma is the field, consciousness
 is the seed, craving is the moisture.

It is possible, however, through developing a consistent awareness in regard to one's actions,

to detect certain ethical causal patterns running through one's life. For example, if one is prone to anger, one notices that this elicits an angry response in others, which may cause us to re-act with our usual anger, causing them to respond with further anger – and so the reactive cycle revolves.

Also, the Buddha distinguishes three kinds of kamma - result: ripening in this life-time, ripening in the next life, ripening in later lives *A.III,415*. Thus, it may appear that some of our actions do not give a result, whereas it may be that they will actually ripen later in life or perhaps the next life. The reality of future existences was a direct experience of the Buddha and many of his disciples. The future destination was frequently mentioned in reference to the results of wholesome and unwholesome actions. Several discourses elaborate in detail some of the gruesome punishments imposed upon those who reappear in the hell realms *A.I,141*; *M.III,183*. It should be emphasised, however, that Eastern thought does not make the divisive contrast between mental and physical, psychological and cosmological, as is done in the West. Thus, for example, unwholesome actions create unwholesome states of mind which – if the inherent craving for further becoming is not removed - condition the re-becoming in unwholesome or afflictive realms of being just like the hell realms *M.I,389*

Therefore, Ananda, kamma is the field, consciousness is the seed, craving is the moisture. For beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, consciousness is established in a lower realm. Thus in future there is again-becoming, rebirth. *A.I,223*

Kamma, literally 'action', is defined by the Buddha as will, volition or intention:

It is intention (volition) that I call kamma. Having willed, one produces kamma through body, speech and mind. *A.III,415*

The fundamental motivating influence of kamma is the belief in and attachment to a permanent sense of self. Thus, for the unenlightened person, all intentions are aimed at preserving selfhood, whether manifesting as bodily, verbal or mental activity. The corresponding result of this intentional activity then contains the seeds of continuing selfhood. In terms of morality, the so-called evil or unwholesome actions (i.e., selfish actions) are the most effective or strongest in reinforcing selfhood, while the so-called good or wholesome actions (i.e., unselfish actions) lead to the lessening or surrendering of selfhood.

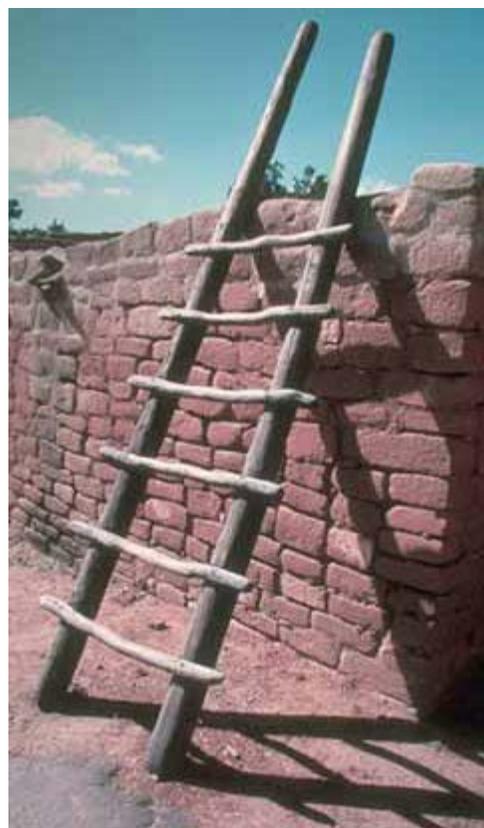
When considering ethics, the wholesome and the unwholesome, reference is usually made to good and evil. But in the Buddha's teaching, more important emphasis is given to wholesome kusala and unwholesome akusala as these are much more extensive than the context of morality. Good and evil are generally defined relative to the prevailing social values at any time, however, the foundations and values of Buddhist ethics are, in essence, free from relativistic limitations. They provide a core of moral principles which are valid for all time and under all circumstances, since they are based on psychological fact and not on external contingencies. By introspection and observation, it can be experienced that the unwholesome roots are undesirable mental states, while it is the common nature of man to avoid what is undesirable or painful and to desire happiness. *Nyanponika Thera, Wh.251-3,p.4-5*)

For example, while it is generally recognised as evil to kill, during times of war killing 'the enemy' is defined as good, and even moral. Or, while most people would define killing a human being as evil, they would not necessarily consider the killing of animals as such. In Buddhism the killing of any living being, even as insignificant as a fly, under any circumstances is considered as unwholesome action. However, the degree of unwholesomeness is conditioned by the severity of the intention and the kind of living being killed. For example, killing a person because they stand in the way of one's greedy ambitions is much more unwholesome than killing a person in self-defence (as modern legal systems recognise), and killing a human being is more unwholesome than killing an animal.

The Buddha's approach to morality was experiential and pragmatic. "This is how I understood bodily conduct: When I observed that by the performance of certain actions, unwholesome factors increased and wholesome factors decreased, then that form of bodily conduct was to be avoided. And when I observed that by the performance of other actions unwholesome factors decreased and wholesome ones increased, then such bodily action was to be followed. The same applies to conduct of speech and the pursuit of goals." *D.II,281 - THIH, p.330 (cf. Kalama Sutta, A.I,188ff.)*

The roots of the unwholesome; greed, aversion and delusion, wholesome and unwholesome actions, also have their causes. While on one hand the Buddha accepted that human beings have 'an element of initiative', he also acknowledged that humans are conditioned by the results of previous actions which manifest in certain fundamental wholesome and unwholesome qualities or tendencies. Thus, in a simple form, Buddhists hold that human nature is neither completely free nor completely determined. Rather they are under the influence of certain conditioned forces but they also have a certain ability to make an effort to change or counter these forces depending upon the strength of the inherent wholesome tendencies. The basic roots of the unwholesome are defined as greed lobha, aversion dosa, delusion moha, and the roots of the wholesome are their opposites: non-greed, non-aversion and non-delusion *M.I,47; D.III,215*.

There are three sources for the origin of kamma. What three? Greed, aversion and delusion are the sources of the origin of kamma. An action done in greed, aversion or delusion - born of, originating in or arising out of greed, aversion or delusion - is unwholesome, blameworthy and has a painful result. It leads to the arising of (further) kamma, not to the cessation of kamma. That action done in non-greed, non-aversion or non-delusion - born of, originating in



or arising out of non-greed, non-aversion or non-delusion - is wholesome, not blameworthy and has pleasant result. It leads to the cessation of kamma, not to the arising of (further) kamma. *A.I,263*

The three roots of the unwholesome are only entirely given up by the fully-enlightened saint or Arahant. While they still act, their actions are completely selfless and thus create no self-confirming kamma and result.

The three unwholesome roots also have their cause and way of being abandoned. Greed arises and increases from unwise attention to an attractive image; aversion arises and increases from unwise attention to a repulsive image; delusion arises and increases from unwise attention. They can be abandoned through the development of: meditation on an unattractive object asubha, the freeing of the mind through friendliness metta cetovimutti and wise attention yoniso manasikara, respectively *A.I,200*.

"But is there, friend Ananda, a path, a way that leads to the giving up of greed, aversion and delusion?"

"Yes, friend, there is such a path, there is a way. It is, friend, this Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This, friend, is the path, this is the way to the giving up of greed, aversion and delusion." *A.I,217, adapted from Nyanaponika, Wh.251,p.44*

If greed, aversion and delusion are given up, one does not plan for one's own harm, for another's harm nor for the harm of both, and one does not experience any mental anguish or distress. Thus is Nibbana seen here and now, is independent of time, inviting inspection, leading onwards and experienced by the wise for themselves. *A.I,159*

A = Anguttara Nikaya

D = Digha Nikaya

translated as 'Sayings of the Buddha' by P.T.S.; and as 'Thus Have I Heard' by Wisdom Publications

Dh = Dhammapada

(various translations, generally using this title)

M = Majjhima Nikaya

Middle Length Sayings by PTS ; Middle Length Discourses by Wisdom Publications

Wh. = Wheel Series

published by Buddhist Publication Society



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EDITORIAL

Less Trust requires More Faith

The past few issues of the Newsletter have pointed to an obvious yet difficult feature of Dhamma; the mortality of its great exemplars. Much loved and valued teachers such as Ajahn Buddhadasa, Ajahn Tate, Ven. Nyanaponika, Ajahn Jun and Master Hua have all passed away within the last couple of years. The Dhamma continues, as they say, although few would deny that the teachings are greatly empowered when there is the living example of someone who can not only explain well, but also live the life with accomplishment. We may much admire cloth, but when it is cut and made into a garment that fits, then its beauty, its value and how it complements the human form can be seen in a very direct way.

What makes such inevitable change less tragic is when Buddha's exhortation to practise as a Sangha (with the detailed instructions that make up much of the Sutta and Vinaya Pitakas) is fully responded to. The teachings are not dependent on charisma; we have the Suttas and a vast range of commentaries. Similarly the Sangha is not dependent on a single patriarch; we have the Vinaya. And in meditation we have the means to cultivate the personal inquiry, purity and dispassion that enable us to use these means independent of bias, views and dogma. Still, when a great Master passes away, the cultivation of the disciples gets a good test. Do we start to panic, or do we try to create a new leader or find a sense of clarity, where for a while there can't be one? Rather than resort to views about the way it should be, or speculate as to how the Master would have responded in such a case, the test entails a coming to terms with the huge gap that such a decease leaves. In times of great change, it may be wisest to move slowly and patiently, guarding the jewels of the Dhamma-Vinaya.

We imagine that there are 'special' people who do these things and that we are not one of them ...

Occasionally, the Newsletter has pointed out the role that lay people play in guarding this treasure. They are in a position to offer support to, and participate in, a proper presentation of the Buddha's Way, this can be as effective as anything else in clarifying and strengthening the definition of their own practice. Also there is the question of personal authority: helping the Dhamma to manifest either as an administrator or as a teacher helps to allay and dispel the comfortable neurosis that it is always up to someone else (more gifted, more accomplished) to do it. We imagine that there are 'special' people who do these things and that we are not one of them; that we are only capable of, or perhaps even only allowed to be, an onlooker. In brief, it is an act of faith in the practice, without which right effort and right livelihood flounder.

Now another change is pending, less a death than a transfiguration. Our "father", the English Sangha Trust, is seeking to reorganise itself as it approaches its fortieth year. From its infancy in the mid-fifties it aspired to the ideal of establishing a Buddhist monasticism in Britain, and from 1977 was a key vehicle for realising that aim. There is much that all of us can be grateful for in this achievement.

The Trust was created in the years before there was a stable, resident Sangha, and over the years it has become apparent that the structure of the relationship between Trust and Sangha does not adequately reflect the principles of the Vinaya. Here, the Buddha decreed that although the Sangha can and should hold the property and possessions donated to it (not individually, but collectively and on behalf of the Sangha of the Four Quarters, present and yet to come), it may not hold money. This latter is the function of a trusted lay manager. The Trust's structure, however, encouraged it to take responsibility for all the 'worldly' affairs of the Sangha; it functioned as their paternal guardian (with the Sangha very much as a dependent). In practice it has been possible to redress some of this disparity, and for many years the view of the Sangha has been well represented and respected, but the Trust's constitution does not reflect this. Added to this, to achieve that Sangha representation, a significant burden of duty has fallen onto the shoulders of a few individuals, who are responsible for leading the community in a number of other roles as well. The monastics have had to become more fixed in roles and positions than properly suits their aspiration to be 'Gone Forth' mendicants - and in the long run this is to nobody's advantage. For the samana the urgent task is to devote their time principally to their spiritual training. The proposal, which has been gestating for several years (and is still not quite hatched), is to restructure the Trust in terms of more clearly interdependent lay and Sangha bodies. While a proposed company to represent the Sangha in this country could be comprised of every monk and nun in this group of monasteries - who could elect representatives to a committee that could give general guidelines - the participation of lay supporters at different levels of administration and responsibility would continue to be essential. As now, this will require informed and capable lay people, but, if the Triple Gem is going to flourish such people are needed to keep places like these monasteries well serviced.

However there's no need for alarm. Having been an abbot and administrator for a while, I realise that I must be one of those 'special' people that I mentioned earlier. Such responsibilities used to make me feel inadequate for a while, but noting the example of my colleagues, and the way things actually worked, it became clear that Dhamma is managed by those who love it enough to give themselves up to its practices. What is vital is the faith that it will work through them (even despite them). So perhaps the only thing that makes someone 'special' is the willingness to work on themselves while working for others. They take responsibility, yet get out of the way.

Meanwhile, back to the editorial. And here also something of a change; Father Editor is packing up his keyboard and heading for the hills for a while. The drawback with having been editor for so long is that I start to imagine I'm indispensable, and even believe my own views. It's worth mentioning that help is always welcome to support the sense of Sangha, and the wish to communicate. Then things will come together in some form or another.

Keep the faith!

Ajahn Sucitto



THIS ISSUE	Cover: ■ The Human Family; Ajahn Sumedho	HOME ■
Signs of Change: ■	Articles: ■ The Sima Ceremony; Ajahn Attapemo ■ Traceless Traces; Venerable Master Hsuan Hua ■ In Memory of Luang Por Jun: Pt. 2; Sr. Sanghamitta ■ Sutta Class; Ajahn Thiradhammo	BACK ISSUES ■
	Editorial: ■ Less Trust requires More Faith; Ajahn Sucitto	

SIGNS OF CHANGE

Kathina and Thot Pah Pah Dates:

U.K.

- Ratanagiri - 15th October
- Devon Vihara - 22 October
- Cittaviveka - 29th October
- Amaravati - 5th November

Switzerland

- Dhammapala - 29th October

Italy

- Santacittarama - 12th November

Temple Update:

Construction work on the Temple project is now under way. After several weeks of expecting the contractors to start "any day now", we knew they had arrived in earnest when the quiet of the morning gruel-time was interrupted by a monster excavator driving into the courtyard. It was not long before the machine was busy. From that day in late July, with the help of the dry weather, work progressed well. In mid-August we held a ceremony to create a sima-boundary, and by early September the foundations were complete.

The clay soils required that the foundations be quite deep, but this has had an added bonus in that in digging the trenches the contractors have unearthed quite a few examples of the local exotic rock, Hertfordshire Pudding Stone, which is often used to ornamental effect in gardens. These may be used in the eventual landscaping around the Temple.

Already the brick and block walls are beginning to emerge out of the earth. Over the next few months the shell of the building will take shape. It was expected that by the end of September all of the invisible works below ground would be finished with the installation of various pipes and cables for water, electricity and the like. December is scheduled as the time for the structural oak frame to be assembled on site. Until then, at the carpenters workshop in Wiltshire, each timber is being crafted, with many of the details hand-chiseled.

Before the frame is brought to Amaravati for final construction the carpenters will assemble it in their yard to ensure that it all fits together accurately, then dismantle it and load it, carefully marked and ordered, onto lorries for the journey here. Meanwhile, on the site, the brick walls will be inching upwards ready to support the roof. If all goes well, by the end of the year the roof timbers will all be in place, the spire will have been lowered into position, and the roof will be ready for tiling early in the new year. With the building then protected from the weather, work can continue inside during the rest of the winter.

Obviously the construction work impinges on daily life at Amaravati, but it has been noticeable how easily the community and visitors have adapted and responded in a positive way to the changes and inconveniences. Many retreatants have commented how little of an intrusion any noise has been. Looking at the ugly mess (the building site could not be

described otherwise at the moment) with the knowledge that this will soon be a meditation hall manages to transform the perception into something joyful - how happy we have been to watch the excavator at work; how delighted when the first concrete blocks emerged from the ground!

Support for the Project

Before work began there had already been considerable interest in the project - enough to encourage us to start with confidence. And in September, to inform more of our friends of what is happening, we wrote to many of you describing the project and how it can be supported. If you did not receive this and would like to, please write to the EST Secretary at Amaravati. As this issue of the Newsletter goes to press we are still hopeful that the first phase of the project can be completed by next summer, and if funds permit it will be possible to continue with work on more of the cloister.

New Plans for Santacittarama:

Anyone who has been to Santacittarama will be aware of its limitations as a meditation monastery of the forest tradition. Until the present time, however, it has served us well enough and people have continued to support it. With the ground floor converted into a meditation hall and accommodation facilities, the limit of possible expansion has been reached, and yet with the recent growth of interest it is already somewhat inadequate. There is too little space to comfortably house more than the three resident monks or those wishing to become anagarikas. Women guests have endured, with little complaint, rented accommodation on a rather busy and noisy road with a very steep climb to the vihara. Without the immediate prospect of any alternative we have learned to live quite happily in this situation, and being relatively free of work projects we have been able to put more time and energy into formal meditation practice. A welcome opportunity! However it has been apparent for some time that the present Santacittarama has reached its full potential, and that eventually we would have to start thinking in terms of looking for a somewhat larger and more secluded property.

Until recently this prospect seemed to be remote enough to not be worthy of much thought because there were too many obstacles – lack of charity status, the unsaleability of the house and a general shortage of funds. The first two factors are nearing resolution and the financial status of the Association has become much more healthy during the last two years.

A group of dedicated Thai supporters have, after consultation with the Sangha, initiated a project which aims to raise sufficient funds to establish a 'Santacittarama Forest Monastery'. By November of this year they hope to be in a position to purchase a suitable plot of land on which a monastery can be built as further funds become available. There will be a special Kathina ceremony in October or November of next year – 1996. In the meantime, this year's Kathina will be on the 19th of November, providing an opportunity for supporters in Italy to meet the Sangha and to find out more about the project; participation in which is not limited to Thais but is open to all nationalities. Once completed, 'Santacittarama Forest Monastery' will serve the general Buddhist community, regardless of country of origin.

We are beginning to look for land in the area immediately around Sezze as we are well established here and have a very good relationship with the local people; we also wish to honour the original intention of being accessible from both Rome and Naples. Already there is one possibility being looked into – a nine hectare (22 acres) plot of land, a bit less than half forested, with a modern bungalow, and a dilapidated building reputed to be a former friary! Before a decision is made, however, many aspects need to be carefully considered, and this is likely to be a slow process.

We will keep you informed of any further developments.

A tribute to George Sharp:

Mr George Sharp has retired from his long-standing chairmanship of the English Sangha Trust. He first assumed this responsibility in 1972, at a time

when the Trust was losing its purpose and direction - and George, almost by an absence of mind, found himself the only one left who was willing to hold it to its original purpose - that of encouraging and supporting a traditional bhikkhu Sangha in Britain.

I first met him in 1976, when I happened to find myself in London on the way back to Thailand. He invited me to use the facilities of the Hampstead Vihara. I was impressed by his sincerity and his quite unusual understanding of the values, aims and purpose of the Bhikkhu life and training. So, when he invited me to stay on in England I felt that it was well worth considering. But first, I insisted that he visit my teacher, Ajahn Chah, in Thailand. It was important to discuss it with him and if Ajahn Chah approved, then I would be willing to come and live in England.

Before the year of 1976 was out, George turned up at Wat Nong Pah Pong – and it was decided that Ajahn Chah and myself would go to the UK in May 1977.

During the past 19 years, George has been a loyal friend, supporter and practitioner of the Dhamma. He has helped us in so many ways - through his advice and skills - and especially with steady and unwavering confidence and respect for the monastic Sangha.

On behalf of the Sangha at Amaravati and its branch monasteries, I wish to express our enormous gratitude and appreciation for all that George Sharp has done, for us and for the establishing of this traditional form in Britain. Even though he has retired from his formal position, we hope that we will always remain good friends and fellow practitioners of the liberating and profound teachings of the Lord Buddha.

Ajahn Sumedho

Ajahn Jagaro:

It is with much regret and sadness that we inform friends and supporters that Venerable Ajahn Jagaro disrobed in early September of this year.

Ajahn Jagaro was ordained in Thailand, aged 24, by Venerable Phra Khru Nanasirivatana, at Wat Pleng Vipassana, in 1972. He moved to Wat Pah Pong to train under Ajahn Chah in 1973 and in due course became the senior incumbent of Wat Pah Nanachat. At the invitation of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia he went to Perth in 1982 and lived for a couple of years in the city and then moved onto the property at Serpentine to develop Bodhinyana Forest Monastery. Under his guidance both the monastery and the Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre in Perth have flourished, a tribute to both his compassionate and generous nature and to the strength and wisdom of his teachings.

After 23 years in the robe his decision to put aside the bhikkhu training would not have been an easy one; feelings of being torn between a sense of duty and responsibility to others and the wish to do what has been felt necessary for his own physical, mental and emotional well-being. The transition from being Ajahn Jagaro, the monk, to John Cianiosi, the lay man, will be one that requires time and patience, and during this time it is important that our underlying feelings of metta and karuna are those that prevail. Spiritual friendship is not dependent on outward appearance or status, rather it comes more from our common refuge in the Triple Gem and shared love of Dhamma. The individual has to find the way which allows them to serve others while attending to their own physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

The Sangha wishes to express its personal appreciation of Ajahn Jagaro's company over the past years and its gratitude for his extensive and sustained efforts in the furtherance and support of the Dhamma.



Family Events:

This year's summer camp has been and gone in both a blaze of sunshine and of glory. The lay organisational team has been well honed over the years and everything ran very smoothly. There was a variety of activities: from dhamma classes and puja, to mask-making and mobiles, and an enthusiastically presented 'dhamma-drama' called 'The Singing Chickens.'

Achieving a balance of 'spiritual' and 'worldly' energies is difficult; a challenge found not only in the camp environment but in all family situations. The opportunity to experiment with this in the supportive atmosphere of Amaravati is one of the great blessings of this annual event.

